



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 28 August 2024

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke,
Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant,
Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Kim O’Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor and Iwan Walters

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

John Pesutto

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

David Southwick

Leader of the Nationals

Peter Walsh

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury

Members of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ¹	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keefe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan ⁵	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole ⁶	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Resigned 7 July 2023

⁶ Sworn in 3 October 2023

Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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Wednesday 28 August 2024

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Bills

Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024

Introduction and first reading

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:33): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Criminal Organisations Control Act 2012 and to make consequential amendments to certain other acts and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (09:33): I ask the minister to provide a brief explanation of the bill.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:35): I thank the honourable member for Malvern. The bill will prevent and disrupt organised crime by strengthening Victoria's response to organised crime. The bill amends the unlawful associations scheme, introduces serious crime prevention orders and bans the public display of gang colours. The bill also provides powers to target organised crime on Victorian worksites.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

The SPEAKER (09:34): General business, notices of motion 25 and 26, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Statutory Rules made under the following Acts:

Administration and Probate Act 1958 – SR 79

Supreme Court Act 1986 – SRs 78, 79.

Motions

Suburban Rail Loop

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Melton for signing Victorians up to their \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop, depriving Melton of their fair share by breaking their promise to electrify the Melton line, meaning commuters spend more time on crowded platforms and slower trains and less time at home.

Leave refused.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will be removed from the chamber. I will not tolerate this type of interjection so early in the morning – or at any time, actually.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for signing Victorians up to \$216 billion in costs for the Suburban Rail Loop, depriving the Bendigo health system of more funding for staff so that ambulances are not continually ramping and putting critical health care at risk.

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Point Cook for signing Victorians up to the \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop and depriving Point Cook residents of a rail line that the booming population needs, forcing locals to spend more time in traffic and less time at home.

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK: I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Greenvale for prioritising the \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop, depriving the community of Greenvale of their fair share by refusing to properly fund stage 2 of Mickleham duplication, meaning locals will spend more time in traffic and less time at home.

Leave refused.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for prioritising the \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop, depriving communities in Yan Yean of \$800,000 to build the much-needed multiuse courts at Hazel Glen College.

Leave refused.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Tarneit can leave the chamber for an hour. The member for Frankston can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Members for Tarneit and Frankston withdrew from chamber.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Eltham for prioritising the \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop, depriving communities in Eltham and Nillumbik of a new local community hospital, which Labor promised but is refusing to deliver.

Leave refused.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for signing Victorians up to her \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop and depriving Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs of their fair share by refusing to build the Clyde railway station and rail extension promised but never delivered by Labor in 1999, 2002, 2006 and 2010.

Leave refused.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and member for Monbulk for signing Victorians up to the \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop, depriving the community of Monbulk electorate in the Dandenong Ranges of their fair share by failing to fund vital road safety upgrades for Mount Dandenong Tourist Road.

Leave refused.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for signing Victorians up to her \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop and depriving the Ripon community and the community of north-west Victoria of their fair share by not reinstating the Maryborough rail freight corridor and refusing to actually complete the Murray Basin rail project.

Leave refused.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for signing Victorians up to her \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop, depriving the San Remo Primary School community in Bass of their fair share by putting the school's promised \$5.3 million upgrade on the backburner, leaving kids without the facilities they deserve.

Leave refused.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Niddrie for signing Victorians up to the \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop, depriving the community of Niddrie of their fair share by delaying the Keilor East railway station, which would have connected 150,000 people to the metro network for the first time.

Leave refused.

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for signing Victorians up to her \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop and depriving the community of Sunbury of their fair share by failing to provide an accessible Sunbury train station that has elevators for wheelchair users.

Leave refused.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for intending to spend \$216 billion on a Suburban Rail Loop nobody wants, depriving Frankston and peninsula communities of their fair share by never supporting the Frankston–Baxter metro rail, causing the Albanese Labor government to scrap \$225 million of Liberal-budgeted project funding.

Leave refused.

Minister for Planning

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house notes the Minister for Planning spoke out of both sides of her mouth when on the same day she announced a fast-tracked apartment tower development, which will remove existing heritage protections, and later claimed to be a protector of heritage when speaking at a Government House event.

Leave refused.

Land tax

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:42): I move, by leave:

Notice of motion 42, standing in my name, relating to the establishment of a parliamentary inquiry into Labor's land tax.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Youth crime prevention

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (09:42): I rise to address the dramatic events that unfolded yesterday in my electorate, opposite the Hawthorn West Primary School. Firstly, I would like to express my thanks and convey the thanks of the entire Hawthorn community to

Mr James Laskie of Barton Milk Bar and to Mr Michael Voss, coach of the Carlton Football Club, for their heroism and bravery in apprehending one of the carjackers. It takes a rare level of courage to run towards danger. These men deserve and have our community's admiration. I also wish to thank Victoria Police for the incredible work they do and for their unwavering professionalism. This incident saw two young men crash and roll a stolen car opposite a primary school at drop-off time. The two men were armed, according to reports, with large knives and, according to those reports, were either drug- or alcohol-affected. We are very fortunate that no-one was hurt or worse.

This is yet another concerning example of the disintegration of Victoria's justice system under the Allan Labor government. As the Allan Labor government continues to gut services, including crime prevention and youth engagement, not to mention police resources, I am concerned that these deeply concerning events will become increasingly common as more young people fall through the cracks. I call on the Premier to step up, show the leadership that the Victorian community wants and deserves and simply do better for our great state.

Monash Demons All Abilities Football Club

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (09:44): I rise to update the house on a very busy and exciting month down in Ashwood district, particularly in the realm of community sport. I begin by congratulating the Monash Demons All Abilities Football Club for their impressive victory against the Mazenod Panthers. The member for Glen Waverley and I share a friendly local rivalry with these two clubs. The Demons are mine; the Mazenod Panthers used to be mine but are now his. We had a bit of a barbecue on and a bit of rivalry, which will continue every year. I also want to give a shout-out to my electorate officer Lisa Williams, who represented me on the day because I was at my son's footy final, which unfortunately they lost.

The trophy that we have now started is named after George Soles. It is called the George Soles Memorial Cup, and it pays tribute to a beloved and respected volunteer with many, many years of dedication to the Demons, being the ground scorer on game days. He used to come every day – rain, hail, shine, whatever – on his mobility scooter to score. I believe even after his family were not playing anymore he would still do that on a weekly basis. What a great guy. I would like to extend my thanks to Peter Willoughby for his dedication to the Demons as secretary. I look forward to the George Soles cup being an annual tradition for many years to come.

Dandenong traders

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (09:45): On the weekend I went and visited traders at Victoria's well-known Little India precinct in Dandenong to hear about some of the plight that traders are going through in relation to their disputes with the state government in relation to rent. Members might be aware that it was the Brumby government that compulsorily acquired these traders, and since then successive governments have tried to manage the redevelopment of central Dandenong without traders' interests. But what we see now is that traders who were promised no rent by the Andrews government are now paying not just rent but in fact double the rent. That is what they are being required to do by the Allan government. Double the rent – it is unfair to do this to small business people who are suffering so much in Victoria, particularly in our famed Little India precinct.

Indian community

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (09:46): While we are talking about this, it appears that after 25 years in Parliament Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan has discovered that Victoria has an Indian community. Maybe it is because Labor is polling just 30 per cent in the polls. Premier Jacinta Allan has never once raised in this Parliament Indian issues, such as visas being rejected by the federal Labor government for Indian families wanting to come here for funerals. Not once has a Labor MP raised the issue of the many, many, many millions of dollars in promises made by Daniel Andrews and his government to temples, to community centres and to aged care facilities that have almost all gone undelivered. Maybe

when the Premier returns from India and goes to the Blackburn Sikh temple she can explain why they have not been delivered.

Macedonian community

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (09:47): I had the great pleasure of attending the FOMKUD Ilinden cultural festival and concert of traditional folk dance in schools on the weekend. It was a night of song, dance and festivities, showcasing the talent of third- and even fourth-generation Victorians of Macedonian ancestry. Stoj Jovevski and president George Lambeski and all members of FOMKUD are dedicated to ensuring the Macedonian culture continues through the generations. I was also proud to present former president Kosta Kolevski, also a long-time friend and resident of the Thomastown electorate, with his lifelong membership and an award recognising his unwavering commitment to the Macedonian Australian community and connection to culture.

Teej Mela festival

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (09:48): It was also a great privilege to celebrate with many women the Teej Mela festival, which is all about celebrating and recognising women – the strength of women, what women do – and also of course the bonds of family and community. These Teej Mela events – for example, the one in Epping, which is run by a great local Nikki Jain – have been going for many years. It is a fantastic success and is just going from strength to strength. And also the Epping–Wollert Nepalese Community – thank you to president – (*Time expired*)

Social media education

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:48): Home: a sanctuary where you should feel safe, where you can be yourself without fear. Yet for too many teenagers that safety is shattered with just a click. What seems trivial to one can be life-threatening to another. Social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat are meant to connect us but instead are tearing us apart. Children are bombarded with unattainable standards and teenagers are trapped in a relentless cycle of comparison and bullying. Addictive algorithms prey on young, vulnerable minds, pushing harmful content and deepening insecurities. Forty-two per cent of young people now face mental health issues because of social media. Anxiety, depression and even thoughts of suicide have become the norm. These platforms are designed to be addictive and result in youth feeling isolated and inadequate in comparison to their peers.

The government must raise the social media age limit to 16, ban algorithms that target young minds and urgently educate both parents and children on safe and preventable digital practices. If this generation is not educated on the effects of their social footprint, then we will be stuck in a cycle of self-perpetrated hate. If we fail to act, we will be complicit in the suffering and loss of countless young lives in the coming years.

The students here today from Alkira Secondary College see firsthand the tight grip of social media on students' mental health and wellbeing. In saying that, we hope you recognise the urgency of this matter and provide the necessary resources required for mental health education. We cannot afford to ignore this plea. The future of our children depends on it. Thank you very much to Alkira Secondary College for an amazing members statement.

Brunswick North West Primary School

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (09:50): Since being elected we have continued to take real action to build a better and fairer community across Brunswick West. This coming Monday, 2 September, I will again have the pleasure of visiting Brunswick North West Primary School to catch up with the school community. Brunswick North West Primary on Culloden Street was first opened way back in September 1929 with just over 500 students and for 95 years has been doing a beautiful job educating local young people in a nurturing and inclusive environment. Today it is home to just under 400 students, and the Victorian Labor government is proud to have invested \$6.2 million to

deliver a new science, technology, environment, language and arts building, which a couple of years on continues to benefit local students. I look forward to the visit on Monday to catch up with principal Hannah Reid and to also take part in a Q and A session with around 150 students, arranged by hardworking local teacher Tim Plummer. I commend the entire school community, all of whom I look forward to advocating on behalf of, for their dedication and work.

St Joseph's School, Brunswick West

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (09:51): On 6 August I had the pleasure to also visit St Joseph's primary school in Brunswick West to meet with principal Matthew Davey. First established alongside the parish in 1913 on the corner of Melville Road and Hope Street, the school is now home to a vibrant community of 200 students. It was lovely to be updated by Principal Davey on the magnificent work of teachers, staff and families to support academic wellbeing and spiritual outcomes amongst students. I look forward to helping the school progress a range of its priorities, including around education infrastructure, facilities, resources and road safety for families along Melville Road, and I look forward to also welcoming the St Joseph's students here to Parliament House in the next couple of weeks.

Dunstan Reserve kindergarten

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (09:51): I also on 6 June joined the Minister for Children to announce a \$3.6 million redevelopment of the Dunstan Reserve kinder.

Mooroopna Park Primary School

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (09:51): Last week I joined some of the students at Mooroopna Park Primary School for lunch as part of the school's healthy food program. The food program provides morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea to ensure all students have access to a regular meal. The school has won numerous awards for this program, including the Best Student Wellbeing Program on the national stage at the prestigious Australian Education Awards. The school also has a bus service in which the staff drive the bus, picking up students from their doorstep in the hope of improving school attendance. They also have a community garden where students get to bring the food from the garden to the plate. The school also recently built a scooter and road safety track on the school grounds, which is so impressive, complete with road signs and a roundabout. It was incredibly humbling to see the team of dedicated staff literally going above and beyond for the needs of their students. The school also has an Easter fundraiser to cover the food program, which is not easy in these times. Hopefully we can get more assistance for this school so they can continue to care for the needs of their students.

Rotary Club of Nathalia

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (09:52): The Rotary Club of Nathalia held their final meeting, after 61 years of service to the Nathalia community. The club presented a Paul Harris Fellow to Loula Oliver for her community service over many years and her role with Rotary. A Paul Harris Fellow is the highest honour you can receive as a Rotarian. The club also recognised Ray Butler for his 61 years of service and Ross Smith for his 47 years of service to the Rotary Club of Nathalia. I would like to thank all the members of the Rotary Club of Nathalia for their service over the years. You should be really proud of your achievements.

Australian Red Cross

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (09:53): I would also like to congratulate Australian Red Cross on their 100 years of amazing service to our communities.

Association of Ukrainians in Victoria

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:53): As usual there was a lot happening in Geelong over the weekend. I had the pleasure of attending the Association of Ukrainians in Victoria Geelong branch. It is celebrating 33 years of Ukraine independence. Thank you to Wally, Linda and Luba and the many

others involved in organising this special event. We were treated to wonderful traditional foods, a flag-raising ceremony and the unveiling of the new signage and coat of arms at Ukrainian House.

South Geelong station

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:53): It was also exciting on Sunday when I joined the Premier, the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, the Deputy Prime Minister and my Geelong region parliamentary colleagues at the new South Geelong station. This week trains have returned on the Geelong and Warrnambool lines, following the duplication of more than 8 kilometres of track between South Geelong station and Breakwater Road and from Marshalltown Road to Waurin Ponds station. This also includes the removal of two level crossings, reducing congestion for tens of thousands of drivers that use these roads each day. The new South Geelong station features a second platform and duplicated track, a new station building that includes a kiosk and enclosed waiting room, secure bike storage and new bike hoops at both ends of the station to link with the new walking and cycling track. There are new accessible pedestrian overpass ramps, lifts and stairs to connect platforms, and of course new landscaping, additional parking, artworks, improved lighting and CCTV across the precinct.

Premier's gala dinner

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:54): Geelong was very excited also to host the Premier's annual multicultural gala dinner.

Australian Women's Small Business Champion Awards

David HODGETT (Croydon) (09:54): Today I would like to recognise the wonderful achievement of Sian Chambers-Vallance, the CEO of local Croydon business Building Better Brains. On Saturday night at the Australian Women's Small Business Champion Awards evening, Sian was announced as a champion in the children's services category. Sian's vision and dedication is to support children with trauma and disabilities within the community through a creative play and strength-based approach with a neuro-affirming lens. Building Better Brains focuses on building skills of attachment, regulation, confidence, self-expression and communication that help support healthier relationships and functioning for life. This is why Sian's business has grown from strength to strength.

In the past year Building Better Brains has offered a range of therapy supports for the community totalling 8000 one-on-one therapeutic sessions and over 2600 participants in group therapy sessions. They have added in school holiday programs, piloted three new programs, supported parents with courses and sessions and provided training and workshops to over 1000 teachers and 850 allied health providers. In addition to this they have helped supervise therapists, students and offered student placements. Sian's husband Tony Vallance retrained, moving from being a teacher to a therapist during the pandemic and joined her in the business. Now, just under three years later, the business has grown to a team of over 20 therapists. Congratulations, Sian, on this wonderful achievement, and I am sure you will continue to provide children and families with much-needed support to build better brains.

Ehlers-Danlos syndrome

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (09:56): EDS. At least eight out of 10 people that I mention EDS to have no idea what it is. If I tell them it is Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, they still have no idea what it is. Yet it is possible that half a million Victorians, both women and men, suffer in chronic pain from this syndrome but are unseen, unheard and unknown. There is no cure, no treatment, no wraparound service, no hub for those that suffer to go to for support, advice or help.

So I would like to thank the member for Northcote and the member for Mordialloc for inviting my favourite middle daughter Emily to come into Parliament last sitting week to talk about her horrific journey through chronic pain and the absolute nightmare of navigating through a myriad of doctors that just did not believe her and knew nothing about EDS. Both members listened to Emily for half an hour, and she spoke about her journey over the last 10 years in trying to find answers to what was

wrong with her. Like many sufferers, Emily would spend days under her electric blanket in chronic pain, not being able to move, not being able to eat. One day I asked her, 'Where does it hurt?' She said to me, 'Every fibre of my being hurts, Dad.'

There is more I could say, but I would ask every member here to look up EDS. Thanks to the women's pain forum and the recent survey, hopefully light will be shone on this condition and sufferers will no longer be unseen or unheard.

Water policy

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:57): Last Friday I attended a water forum in Bendigo with many industry leaders and politicians in farming communities that are very concerned about the buybacks that will destroy northern Victorian communities. One speaker from the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority told the room they currently have 650 megalitres to use within the Goulburn River catchment for environmental projects and they cannot use the water they already have. So more water buybacks will have no environmental benefit in our region at all.

What was distressing was that the Victorian Premier arrived and, along with the Victorian Minister for Water, admitted that what the Albanese government is doing to rural communities in Victoria and the damage that is being forced upon farmers and irrigators is a disgrace. But then only 2 hours later, in the same regional city of Bendigo, the Premier refused to meet with farmers who had joined together to be heard and tell the Premier how renewable projects are destroying our local communities. So in the course of a single day in Bendigo the Victorian Premier wanted to stand shoulder to shoulder with farming communities about the Albanese government and what it is doing to them and then refused to meet with the farmers straight after that.

Premier, you cannot have it both ways. Do you truly stand with our farming communities in northern Victoria or not? Supporting our local communities is not relative to your Melbourne agenda; you either support us through thick and thin or you do not support us at all. You need to make a choice. Farming families feed this state, and it is time you stood up for them every day, not just when it suits you.

Caroline Chisholm Catholic College

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Koroit) (09:59): I was recently invited by the youth in my electorate of Koroit to speak to the senior students at Caroline Chisholm Catholic College. I got to talk to classes in economics, legal studies, business management and politics, sharing my experiences from both the union movement and my time in this place. It was great to see these students so engaged and so eager to learn. The tour of the school was truly impressive. School captains Mathias Sisay and Micah Cursio showed me around their amazing upgraded and new facilities. Seeing such a well-equipped school really drives home the importance of investing in modern educational facilities.

The afternoon was truly special, and thanks to Mr Paul Ives and Flavio Faccone, who arranged the itinerary, alongside the acting principal Ms Laura Ruddick. I enjoyed having a bite to eat and chatting with a number of teachers, and then I was given a tour by the co-captains Mathias and Micah and the director of development, who, coincidentally, I went to high school with in Altona at Mount St Joseph Girls' College, Ms Jess Eng Forbes. I then addressed the year 12s in the school auditorium, where there were a number of brilliant questions, and I finished off the afternoon with the SRC and captains from years 10, 11 and 12 for an informal Q and A. It was a great afternoon, and it is clear that when we connect education with cutting-edge resources we are setting up our students for success. A big thanks to Caroline Chisholm Catholic College for their hospitality and best of luck to the VCE students for their upcoming exams.

Australian Good Food Guide 2024 Yarra Valley Readers' Choice Awards

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:00): The Yarra Valley boasts an impressive and vast selection of elite restaurants, bars and wineries. Congratulations to the restaurants in the area who received the Australian Good Food Guide's 2024 Yarra Valley Readers' Choice Awards. These include the

Gladysdale Bakehouse at Yarra Junction. Jason and Mel Rush have managed that for 17 years and continually do a great job. In Healesville there are many, which is no surprise to me at all. We have Monroe's Burgers & Beers, The Laneway, the Thai Kitchen, Spinner's Souvlaki Bar & Grill and No.7, which is set up in the very cool little Lilydale Road precinct. We have Yileena Park at Yarra Glen, Fondata 1872 at Kangaroo Ground and Little Joe in Warburton. Congratulations also to the winners in the good food guide's High Country readers' choice awards. The Fields in Mansfield and The Trawool Estate in Trawool were recognised, and The Trawool Estate is also a great place to stay.

State forest access

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:01): A cloud remains over the future of our state forests and whether there are still plans by the Labor government to lock up some of our forests and turn them into national parks. Although the Premier says that bush users will be able to access our forests, she is silent on whether or not some of those forests will still be turned over to national parks. The Premier needs to tell bush users that none of our existing public forests will be locked up. The eminent panel working on this is yet to deliver their report or recommendations, but we need strong action from the Premier here.

Ballan Red Cross

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (10:02): I attended a really beautiful event last week in my electorate, the 110th anniversary of the Ballan Red Cross. Australia's Red Cross is a volunteer-based organisation that exists to reduce human suffering. The Ballan Red Cross is the second oldest Red Cross in Victoria, formed only one week after the Melbourne branch in 1914. The celebration was a lunch at the mechanics institute in Ballan, and it was in that very same room that the Ballan Red Cross was formed 110 years ago. The great-great-granddaughters of one of the founding members were in attendance. The branch historian gave a wonderful insight into the volunteers in Ballan and all that they have achieved. The room was full to the brim with people paying their respects. There were more than 100 people at the event, and they raised nearly \$5000 on the day for the Red Cross. It was a truly wonderful event, and I would like to give a big shout-out to Anne Eskdale, the branch chair, for bringing it all together, though she is always quick to point out that a wonderful group of volunteers gave their time and effort. Lunch was all handmade by the local women of the Red Cross. It was an honour to meet the Victorian state director, Nichola Krey. Thank you to all in the Red Cross.

Tibetan community

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (10:03): I rise today to support the Tibetan people's nonviolent struggle for freedom and autonomy. I met with a delegation of representatives from the Tibetan government in exile who recently visited the Victorian Parliament, and their visit was a powerful reminder of just what is occurring in Tibet under the illegal occupation by China. During the visit the Tibetan delegation highlighted the ongoing oppression and abuse of the human rights of the Tibetan people by the Chinese government, including religious repression, forced assimilation, environmental destruction, arbitrary arrest and detention, persecution and surveillance. Despite the systemic destruction of its culture and freedom, Tibet's determination to achieve self-determination remains strong. The unwavering resilience of the global Tibetan community continues to inspire me and many others. As a democratic society, we must stand with those who are fighting to uphold freedom and human rights, so I urge the Victorian Parliament and fellow MPs to hear and support Tibetans, to advocate for the rights of the Tibetan people and to support their peaceful struggle for self-determination. Free Tibet.

Housing

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (10:04): I also speak in support of new proposed laws to give local councils the ability to regulate Airbnbs. In the middle of a housing crisis, to have so many homes locked up and unavailable is just not acceptable, and I urge local councils to make the most of these new powers to make more homes available.

Northcote electorate

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (10:05): I rise to update the house on the exciting happenings in the Northcote electorate. In the heart of our suburbs, Northcote High is on the cusp of opening the doors of its brand new STEM building. Principal Chris Jones gave me a sneak peek last week as we walked through three storeys of cutting-edge labs, classrooms, admin and student spaces and an expansive library. It is stunning, and it is critical infrastructure for a high school which caters to almost 2000 local students every year.

Nearby, the Axion Estin Northcote monastery on St George's Road last weekend hosted a wonderful Greek community festival. There was lively music, dancing, food and even camel rides. I congratulate the church volunteers and businesses. Our family had a blast. This monastery has big plans, with funding from federal Labor, to create a visionary amphitheatre and an agora space in the future – very exciting times.

Further north, construction is about to start on a new kindergarten in Thornbury, with the builder now appointed. The new kinder onsite at Thornbury High will have three rooms, outdoor learning areas and provide 99 much-needed kinder places in the inner north. Down in Westgarth the slab has been poured and precast craned in for Westgarth Primary's amazing \$13 million project to construct a new competition-grade gym and classroom building. The whole community has been buzzing with excitement to see this hard-fought-for project take shape.

Finally, a big shout-out to the Fitzroy Stars men's seniors, who booked their place in the Northern Football Netball League division 3 grand final by defeating Old Paradians by six points last Saturday. Patrick Farrant kicked eight thumping goals, and we are so excited. Go Stars!

Festival of Australian Queer Theatre

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:06): The inaugural Festival of Australian Queer Theatre was held in Ballarat over the weekend, with 13 events over four days in three venues. I was honoured to attend the opening night on Thursday with so many members of the Ballarat rainbow community – a great reflection of the support that they continually give each other – as well as visitors to Ballarat for the festival.

Queer theatre is a celebration of visibility, storytelling and inclusion. The festival creates a safe space for bold representation, boosts individual and collective pride and promotes dialogue about LGBTIQ+ lives and lived experience. It is also a brilliant opportunity to watch cutting-edge Australian queer performances for community and allies. Events like the Festival of Australian Queer Theatre also generate benefits for the local economy and further cement why our rainbow community members are proud to call Ballarat home.

Significantly, Ballarat is home to the fifth largest LGA of LGBTIQ+ community members in the state. Festivals only become a reality because of the artistic vision and persistence of the people behind them. Well done to the organisers, artists, supporters, venue and media partners and volunteers who contributed to make the festival a success. I would like to acknowledge and thank Deb Lord not only for the drive behind the festival but for being a constant champion of the LGBTIQ+ community in Ballarat. I am extremely proud that the Allan Labor government supported the inaugural festival, and I am confident that it will grow from strength to strength.

Chinese Culinary Federation Australia

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (10:08): As members know, I enjoy tucking into a succulent Chinese meal, so I was delighted to be invited by the Chinese Culinary Federation Australia, alongside the member for Glen Waverley, to its recent Chinese culinary showcase and exchange dinner. The Chinese Culinary Federation Australia works closely with industry to promote skills, training and collaboration in the art of Chinese cooking, and the dinner was an opportunity to showcase

Melbourne's Chinese culinary scene to training providers while enjoying some amazing food prepared by master chefs from China.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Chinese Culinary Federation Australia president Yutang Zheng, vice-presidents Susan Zheng and Liam Zhou, secretary Ying Hou and all the members of the fantastic CCFA team on their silver medal at this year's Culinary Olympics. Competitions such as these take a lot of practice and preparation, and it is a testament to the team that they had such huge success. I would also like to thank the CCFA for their dedication and hard work in providing a cultural feast and providing cultural exchange.

Roberts McCubbin Primary School

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (10:09): I congratulate Roberts McCubbin Primary School on their first and third placegetters in the annual Mont Albert and Surrey Hills Rotary Club public speaking competition. Congratulations to Benson, who won the competition – the first time that a student from Roberts McCubbin has won – for his interpretive dance and dramatic performance, and to Aurelia, who was awarded the third place for talking about women in science. Congratulations, Benson and Aurelia.

Southern Football Netball League

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:09): On Sunday I had the absolute pleasure of attending the Southern Football Netball League division 1 women's final between Endeavour Hills Falcons and Casey Thunders at Barry Simon Reserve. I can hear the member for Cranbourne moaning in the background. That is because it was a very close game, and from a come-from-behind performance I am very excited to say the Endeavour Hills Falcons came home with a win. Huge congratulations to coach Chris Arnott and Martin Baker, captain Nicola Weston and best-on-ground Rebecca Sadler, who had an absolute cracker of a game in the back line.

I would also like to congratulate all the team members: Eden Tone; Kaci Hillis; Jasmin Hansen; Kirsty Roche; Lana Fullwood; Alice Barfoot; Kayla Cottrell; Alicia Heins, who might have been a captain – I may have made a mistake with that earlier on, and I apologise; Alizha Roche; Rachel Redinger; Elaine Parkinson; Montaya Forsyth; Natalie Van Dort; Alicia Robinson; Torri – my eyesight is really failing here – Marmion; Shenae Chadwick; Katie Mitchell; Ruby Bastian; Samantha Dowgilmour; Nicole Knudsen; and Fern Brady. Congratulations. I have just actually read out the wrong team. I have actually read out the Casey Thunders team, and I apologise. I will read you the other one another day.

Early childhood education

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:11): I am delighted today to acknowledge the recent Early Learning Matters Week and particularly to thank the early learning educating workforce. It was particularly wonderful to meet the early childhood educators, including Hisanthe and Tess at the Green Gully Kindergarten. Thank you for the painting. I actually have the wonderful painting and gave one as well to my mother, who is 92 and really appreciated it. So thanks to Hisanthe and Tess and also to Prabh, Archi, Syed and Hayley at Aspire in Cranbourne West. It was really wonderful to spend time there. Their commitment to fostering an inclusive and nurturing learning environment is inspiring. I would also like to thank Julie, who is an educator at the Judy Clarkson Cranbourne Day Care and Kindergarten Centre, and two of their young learners. We have the Minister for Transport Infrastructure at the table, and both of us were lucky enough to meet Catherine and Alaska. They are topnotch children, and I have got their artwork as well on my fridge. This just shows that the future is indeed bright.

Baitul Salam mosque

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:12): On another matter, I was very pleased to visit the Baitul Salam mosque with my friend the member for Narre Warren North for their peace symposium on Sunday. It was a really terrific event, and I am very grateful to the organisers.

The Orange Door

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:12): I would also like to thank the people from the Orange Door for the work they did – another terrific meeting I have had.

Cranbourne East Secondary College

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:12): I would also like to thank the Cranbourne East Secondary College year 9s for the mock interviews. I have never met a smarter bunch of children. The future is bright.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:13): I rise to make a contribution on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2023–24 budget estimates, in particular chapter 6, about the Department of Transport and Planning; more specifically section 6.6, which refers to roads and road safety, the key issues; and even more specifically, the road maintenance and repairs package on page 97. It is no secret that in the state of Victoria our roads are well and truly stuffed – in regional Victoria and metro alike. I have raised these issues time and time again, and we seem to have little action in this area.

On the weekend I was on the Heidelberg-Kinglake Road, driving between Kinglake and St Andrews. The Kinglake end has some enormous potholes opening up. What is happening now is that the locals are taking to circling those with different coloured paints and actually writing a number of expletives beside them to warn motorists about how bad they are. There were so many potholes there that I was quite taken aback. Further down between Panton Hill and St Andrews there are a whole lot more potholes. I have mentioned Eltham-Yarra Glen Road recently, which has had a little bit of patchwork but no significant work done on it.

I have three particular areas at the moment that are causing local residents grief. On the Goulburn Valley Highway between Homewood and Kerrisdale near the Dairy Creek Road, the guardrail on the Dairy Creek bridge has suffered damage. There is a traffic light that restricts movement to one lane in each direction. The locals want to know: what is the plan to fix this? What is the timeframe to fix this? How long is that traffic light going to be in place? It is a fairly busy commuter road, that highway, and people have to suffer this every single day.

Equally, on the Goulburn Valley Highway at Thornton, over the Goulburn River, the bridge and road are both damaged. There have been numerous complaints about tyres blowing out, and you can imagine when a lot of people are having their tyres blow out they get pretty agitated and want to see it fixed. They talk to the council and talk to me. It becomes very dangerous for the people that have suffered the tyres blowing out and the road conditions, and there is debris everywhere. Some of it is from the rains – it is at river level. Again, the people between Eildon and Thornton want to know what the plan is to fix this section of road and the bridge. How long is it going to be before that happens?

Further north, at the Mansfield-Woods Point Road between Mansfield and Jamieson we have had a complete failure of the road surface. There has been a traffic light with one lane in each direction in place for 12 months. It is quite extraordinary to have it for 12 months. The cost of hiring that light must surely exceed the cost of actually repairing the road. There have been a number of complaints to me and to the shire about near misses in that area, and in fact very recently there was a near miss with a bus and another vehicle. This could have been quite catastrophic. This section of road has gone from one lane being closed to both lanes being open, but as described to me by local Craig, it is now very much choose your own adventure. The road surface is so badly damaged and with the potholes it is very difficult, so as you go through that and it is your turn at the traffic light, you have got to decide which path you are going to navigate, and you do that yourself. It has been 12 months, and the people

who use the Mansfield-Woods Point Road, particularly the residents of Jamieson and Kevington, who go down there daily to Gaffneys Creek and Woods Point, want to know how much longer they are going to have to suffer with this traffic light and one lane of traffic. I think it is about 10 kilometres from the main Mount Buller Road.

These are examples of where the government clearly does not have enough money to do some basic road repairs, and residents in the country are absolutely fed up. They are fed up with the cost blowouts on major projects in Victoria – billions and billions of dollars – but bridges cannot be repaired and dangerous sections of road cannot be repaired. It is just not good enough.

We have the Whittlesea-Yea Road that is in need of work and again the Melba Highway, which I have talked about many, many times. It has had patch jobs. It has had some little bits. It is opening up again because not enough money is allocated to fixing it. There is another section of road at Cathkin on the Maroondah Highway link where the road surface is completely crumbled and failing, and I see very little sign of work being done there. This is just not good enough by the Labor government.

Electoral Matters Committee

Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (10:18): I rise to make a contribution to discuss the report of the inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election by the Electoral Matters Committee. When it comes to democracy, things that all members of this place should agree on, and indeed the vast majority of the Victorian community, are the notion of free and fair elections, the notion of respect and making sure that those values that we all hold stay true even in what is a very hotly contested election, as was the 2022 and of course other elections.

I want to thank the committee for the work that has been done and the importance of reviewing and reflecting on our electoral processes with the idea of continual improvement. The report is quite extensive and contains a number of recommendations related to how the election was run, voter participation, timelines, the Victorian Electoral Commission staff and a broad summary of the work that has been done. There were four major areas where the committee recommended changes, and the areas that I want to focus on are:

adjusting the election timeline, including reducing the early voting period from twelve to seven days, closing the electoral roll earlier and bringing forward the close of nominations –

and –

improving the VEC's training procedures and products to ensure that election officials are familiar with the rules and provide a good experience for voters

I am certain that many members of this house – all members of this house – have had interesting experiences whilst participating in what is the fine example of pre-poll voting. Certainly at the past three state elections I have had the opportunity locally to be at an early voting centre. Disappointingly, I have seen an erosion of behaviour and practices, abuse. I was having a conversation just this morning with the outstanding member for Mordialloc. We were reflecting that what occurs at many of these early voting centres is frankly disgraceful. The work of the committee highlighted this. More than highlighting this, it recommended some changes that I wholeheartedly endorse. The reason for that is we know that early voting was originally established for people that could not vote on election day. What we have seen is a whole range of different muppets and characters and others that front up to early voting frankly just to cause trouble. These people need to be called out. These people are disgraceful, they are shameful, they are muppets of the highest order. Those who want to participate in democracy – and I think this should be right across all sides of this place and the other place – value and uphold our democracy, and it has a sacred and important place for respect, values and decency for everyone. I know as a candidate and as a member that I have always made sure that we have a conversation pretty early on, particularly with the Libs, to say, 'We're going to follow the rules and

we're going to conduct ourselves with decency and respect.' When the muppets turn up, that goes out the window.

We as a Parliament and we as a government need to make sure that we do more. The recommendations that have been provided by the committee, particularly around reducing those pre-poll days, those early voting days, are something that, as I said before, I wholeheartedly endorse. This is something that we need to move on, because it is about safety, it is about certainty, it is about protecting our democracy. It is also about making sure that if you turn up to vote for the very first time, the experience is a good one and not a terrible one. That is a very important thing. I thank the committee for their work.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (10:23): I rise to make a contribution on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report into the 2023–24 budget estimates, and I refer to page 146, which relates to management of public land. I want to talk for a little while about a few feral animal issues that we have in our region at the moment. The first of those is an increasing wild pig problem. I knew of their presence in the area, but I did not realise just how widespread and significant they are. They have made their way that far south now that they are currently in the Tambo valley and Snowy valley, impacting farmers in that area. Apart from causing extraordinary damage to the landscape, they are also a very strong vector of disease. Our agricultural sector is extremely concerned about the impacts that they will potentially have on their livestock. I know there is some work going on in that space in relation to controls, but it is not commensurate with the level of the problem that we have. We certainly need a greater focus on controls in that area. I urge the minister to pick that up and put a few more resources into that issue, because it has the potential to have very, very serious impacts.

I have spoken in this chamber before about the wild dog program. The reason I raise it again is I know that a decision is imminent on its continuation. To even diminish this program, let alone get rid of it, would have significant consequences for our farming sector in East Gippsland and Gippsland more generally and also the north-east of the state. The spate of killings of lambs has increased over recent weeks. We have also had calves that have been killed, with the dogs eating their tongues out. We have had an alpaca killed in the last week by wild dogs. We have got footage being sent into my office of packs of these dogs pursuing cows and calves on farms. The issue that we have is you cannot control them only on private land; they must be controlled on the private–public interface. The doggers will tell you they need to trap these dogs on the tracks and trails adjacent to private property. You cannot trap a dog in an open paddock. Once they get onto farmers' land, on private property, it is just way too late to control them. So we need to maintain that 3-kilometre buffer zone to allow the doggers to do their stuff, basically.

Some put up fencing as the answer: 'Let's invest in fencing.' When you have got trees falling because the government will not allow clearing any more than 1 metre from a boundary fence, you have got trees falling over fences. We had a lot come down last night, actually. You have got samba deer, you have got wombats and you have got the pigs bringing fences down all the time. The fencing is one tool, but we need to be able to maintain every tool in the toolbox to be able to control these dogs. To let it go will be just a huge impact on our farming sector. We need to maintain it. We have currently got, through two petitions, around 5000 signatures that have been lodged. We will be forwarding them on to the minister in the coming weeks. But to think that you can diminish this by having an authority-to-control-wildlife permit provided to farmers is a ridiculous notion. An authority-to-control-wildlife permit is not the answer to this. We need to keep this program going.

While I am talking about authority-to-control-wildlife permits, the staff at the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action in northern Victoria may well have an application coming in very shortly from the member for Euroa. I just want to tell this story, because it is quite humorous. On arriving home late on the weekend, she was pursued by a wombat – attacked by wombat – after it was

flushed out of her garden by her dog Alfonse. Alfonse – if you can picture this – flushes the wombat out of her garden. It pursued the member for Euroa, and she has pulled a few muscles in her body, which is causing her quite a bit of grief this week. She has not been in the chamber today. When I was talking to the member for Euroa about this and trying not to laugh too much, she told me that she has strained a whole lot of muscles in her body and torn a few, one of them being what she described to me as the ginie muscle. I do not know where that is or what that is, but she is in a lot of pain. I told her I am going to raise this in the chamber, and she had no issues with that at all. I have seen the damage wombats do when they attack, and I would hope that that authority is approved.

Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (10:28): I rise to speak on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. This report, which was tabled in May, particularly looks at road safety behaviours during and post the pandemic. I would like to put this on record because I have not had the opportunity to do so yet: I would like to thank the team that support the committee – the secretariat, Kerryn Riseley, researcher Dr Marianna Stylianou, Alyssa Topy and Adeel Siddiqi – for all their work. That team does an incredible job to support me as the chair and the committee members as well. They do a powerful amount of work behind the scenes, so I would like to thank them.

With over 300 submissions and six public hearings, we did have some disturbing evidence to the committee. The committee learned that many Victorians now feel that behaviours, particularly of drivers and road users, have become disturbingly risky. They are more impatient and they are aggressive, inattentive and reckless on our roads. I drive a lot around the Bellarine, and I see it myself. Shockingly we also had evidence from the police that drivers engage in more risky behaviours, such as speeding and driving under the influence. The rise of people not wearing a seatbelt is incredibly disturbing as well, as is the prevalent use of devices in the car. One of the submissions that was presented to the committee said that mobile phone usage was so bad that many drivers have nearly rear-ended another driver because they were focused on their phone, one person saying that driving a car is no longer about that main task but that the car has become an office, with rampant mobile use and texting.

The final report has 56 recommendations, and we know we need to do everything we can to work towards the Victorian road safety strategy of zero deaths by 2050. We have seen some tragic accidents – fatalities more recently – involving pedestrians, and I certainly take this opportunity to give my condolences to families and communities affected. There are too many lives being lost, and it is so, so sad.

In this report we also urge the government to adopt a hierarchy system where those who can do the most harm to others have a duty of care to reduce the danger that they pose to our most vulnerable. At the top of that list are our pedestrians, which could be children or our senior Victorians, and cyclists and horse riders. In the middle of the hierarchy are our car drivers and then vans and small trucks, and at the bottom are our large trucks and buses. In doing this we would have to change our attitudes and societal norms in an education campaign.

Road policing assistant commissioner Glenn Weir also presented to the committee. He gave some really strong evidence of what police are seeing. He has recently said, though, that if we continue on the trend that we have seen recently, we are going to exceed last year's 296 fatalities, and that is going to be the worst in 15 years. We need everyone on board, and that includes community, to help us, otherwise we are going to see more families suffer. This obviously goes to our recommendation with that hierarchy system where everyone has a responsibility.

One of the other recommendations was to review the location of pedestrian crossings on arterial roads to ensure that there are regular crossings to link to public transport stops and activity centres such as

schools. I am pleased that within the Bellarine electorate we will have some additional wombat crossings installed at two very busy roundabouts – one in Ocean Grove near Grubb Road and the other at a Barwon Heads roundabout near Golf Links Road. These are really busy roundabouts, particularly for students who are catching buses to school or getting to sporting precincts.

Many constituents who have raised this with me but also who made submissions to the committee noted that particularly pedestrians and cyclists feel safer when they have that dedicated infrastructure. I know, being from a regional area, not all of my suburbs have footpaths. Not all of my suburbs have dedicated cycling lanes. This is something we need to look at. This is going to be a collective responsibility for everyone. As a community we cannot accept the trend that we are seeing. I thank the committee for their work and look forward to the government's response.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (10:33): I am pleased to rise today to talk about the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2023–24 budget estimates, and I am going to reference chapter 2 on the fiscal strategy of the government, which is:

- ... creating jobs, reducing unemployment, restoring economic growth
- ... returning to an operating cash surplus
- ... returning to operating surpluses
- ... stabilising debt levels.

This is all very good, and I suppose if we all had crystal balls back then, wouldn't we be wiser? When we talk about creating jobs and economic growth it is a pity that the ABS data that came out yesterday says over 152,000 businesses have left the state of Victoria. You cannot have economic growth when businesses are fleeing the state to other states.

Michaela Settle: We're the fastest growing economy in Australia.

Wayne FARNHAM: Well, that is debatable. We also have the greatest debt of many other states. We have the greatest debt, and returning things to operating cash surpluses means you would have to build things on budget, which this government has failed to do. Just yesterday we heard of another \$888 million blowout. That is the West Gippsland Hospital with \$200 million in change – \$880 million, which is \$200 million-plus in change after you build the West Gippsland Hospital. That is not to mention that if we want to get things to a cash surplus we should not have blown another \$380 million on the Gippsland rail upgrade. The project total was \$540 million, and it has gone \$380 million over budget. That is an 80 per cent blowout. With that original budget it was meant to duplicate the line from Bunyip to Longwarry, including the bridge. Because of the waste of the Labor government, that section of the project has been shelved. There is apparently a report out there that references the southern brown bandicoot and some Strzelecki gums. I am yet to see that report, although I do have a freedom-of-information application out on it. It has not been released. I am doubting if it even exists, to be honest. I think the reality of that project was it went so far over budget that the government just said, 'We will not duplicate this section of track because, quite frankly, we have run out of money,' and that is why that part of the project has not been done.

Talk about stabilising debt levels, what does that mean? We are going to be in debt to the tune of \$188 billion. At the moment we are paying \$15 million a day in interest, or \$26 million or somewhere in that range. But the worst thing about this is if we continue on with the Suburban Rail Loop, Standard & Poor's have said they will downgrade our credit rating, and it will be between a range of 0.1 and 0.5 per cent. How much extra interest will that cost Victorians per day? Rather than fiscal strategy, this is fiscal irresponsibility, what is happening at the moment. The fiscal risk in Victoria at the moment, which is here, is the Allan Labor government. The fiscal risk of Victoria is this government.

We have a housing strategy that the government has come nowhere near delivering. They are 25,000 homes short in the first 12 months – of the 80,000 homes a year, they are 25,000 short. That means next year you have got to deliver over 100,000 homes to meet your target. That will never happen. I can tell you now, that will never happen. You have got more chance of me growing an afro than this government delivering 100,000 homes next year. It is a shame, because we have got a project in my electorate that is due to start. What has happened here is it has been approved by the Minister for Planning, they put out a render of the project and now I have seen the elevations of this project, and it is disgraceful. It is a Soviet-style, 1970s type of construction. It is the ugliest building I have ever seen. What has been approved by the minister is now completely different. What got delivered and what was in the community consultation with my electorate are two completely different things. I have written a letter to the minister, I would like to catch up with the Minister for Planning, because she needs to jump on Housing Choices Australia and get them to deliver what the community expected.

Electoral Matters Committee

Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (10:38): I rise on committee reports to talk about the inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election. Forgive me if this sounds a little bit like the intellectual pathway that we took with the member for Sunbury, who eloquently talked about some of the issues in the report, but I think it is important to put on the record some of the challenges that were experienced and some of the issues that were faced during that election.

First of all, I want to give a massive shout-out to the staff at the Victorian Electoral Commission, who do an incredible job in turning around an election process and the democratic will of Victorians. If all the criticism of the VEC is sometimes the timeliness, then we are in a really great frame in the state of Victoria with it and the work that is done by the AEC. They are an incredible group that has a huge amount of integrity and the trust of Victorians. Despite some of the concerning elements that were trying to talk down the election at the time and some of the predictable types on social media and other elements, no-one could question their integrity and the high order of trust that they have with Victorians.

There are some concerning trends and behaviours over time through elections. We now have about one in eight who are not participating in election outcomes. This is a trend that we are seeing across other states and territories and across the world, where we see people pulling out of democratic systems. I think it is a really important point around how the VEC and the AEC are seen in our communities and how they are supported to communicate with the new generation of voters coming onto the roll. We do some great work through the education system in understanding democracy and civics, but we need to make sure that people feel connected to that and that it is a part of their lives into the future as well. That 88 per cent turnout rate of the more than 4.3 million Victorian voters is of concern.

I want to give a big shout-out to the committee and the member for Kororoit, who does an extraordinary job as chair. This is a really great report, and I think there will be bipartisan interest in and support for some of the recommendations that are being put forward.

Another concerning element was the behaviour that we saw at some polling booths. There is no way that Victoria Police can be asked to front up to address volunteer or candidate concerns each and every moment, but I see concerning trends ahead where we see division in the community, and particularly some of the antics even in this place, that is legitimised in what goes from protest to disruption to intimidation. I think we have to be really careful around that line. We have seen significant examples in other jurisdictions where candidates and elected representatives have been put at risk, and I think we need to foreshadow some of the degradation of standards that we see in this place, both bringing protesters in to intimidate and close down the Parliament and even the behaviour of elected leaders in this place as well.

The inverse to that, where we see standards being raised, was the recent example of Premier Chris Minns, former Premier Dom Perrottet and former Premier Mike Baird in New South Wales. When we see cross-party representation and bipartisanship like that it should not be the exception. Rightly, Premier Chris Minns has been given accolades for the standards that he set. There was that great photo of democratically elected leaders together by the new tunnel upgrades – I think it was at Martin Place where they all gathered together to recognise that. That is the kind of spirit and democracy and integrity that we need, not some of the degradation of standards that we have seen in the United States or some of the stuff that we saw during the COVID pandemic that led into polling booths. We need to see those standards raised. Giving a little bit of your political stripes to get better outcomes is something that we should lean in on and do and see those opportunities when they present as well. That goes down to how behaviours are exhibited at polling booths.

The last thing I want to reflect on is the huge stretch of resources and the impact of having two weeks of early voting. I think it is smart and supported to have a Saturday-to-Saturday program, but there is really low voter turnout in that first week. Sometimes, as you will know, Deputy Speaker, you will see a couple of tumbleweeds go past and then a car will pull up and 10 candidates will descend. I do not think we lose anything with our low voter turnout numbers in that first week, when really the last three or four days before election day see the real surge in voting. So I think if we did a Saturday to Saturday we would ease the impact on resources. About 49.5 per cent of people vote early, 10 per cent do postal votes and then about 35 per cent vote on the day, so I think that is a really important point around Saturday to Saturday. It would be a good thing resource wise and also make it more inclusive for people at polling booths.

Bills

Short Stay Levy Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (10:44): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Short Stay Levy Bill 2024:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (**Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Short Stay Levy Bill 2024.

In my opinion, the Short Stay Levy Bill 2024 (**Bill**), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this Statement.

Overview

This Bill introduces the short stay levy (**SSL**) and consequently amends the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* (**TA Act**) and the *Owners Corporation Act 2006* (**OC Act**).

Many provisions of the Bill do not engage the human rights listed in the Charter because they either do not affect natural persons, or they operate beneficially in relation to natural persons.

Human rights issues

The rights under the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are the right to property, the right to privacy, the right to freedom of movement, the right to a fair hearing, the presumption of innocence and the right against self-incrimination.

Right to property: section 20

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with law. This right is not limited where there is a law that authorises a deprivation of property, and that law is adequately accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable a person to regulate their conduct.

Imposition of SSL

Part 2 of the Bill prescribes the regime by which the SSL operates. These clauses engage the right to property to the extent that a natural person may be liable for the SSL.

The imposition of SSL is not arbitrary because it is precisely formulated in Part 2 of the Bill. The clauses are adequately accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly. Furthermore, these natural persons will have the protections provided by the TA Act including rights of objection, review, appeal and refund of overpaid tax.

Reimbursement for SSL by occupiers of short stay accommodation

Clause 15 obliges a person, other than the owner or renter, who is in exclusive occupation of short stay accommodation, and who accepts direct bookings in respect of that accommodation, to remit amounts of money to the owner equivalent to any SSL chargeable in respect of those bookings and applicable penalty tax and interest. This may engage the right to property to the extent that natural person occupiers may be liable to make payments to owners of short stay accommodation.

The amounts required to be paid to owners by occupiers are not arbitrary as the SSL is precisely formulated in Part 2 of the Bill. These clauses are adequately accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person occupiers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly.

OC Act amendments

Division 1, Part 6 of the Bill amends the OC Act to allow owners corporations to make rules by special resolution prohibiting the use of certain lots as short-stay accommodation. This engages section 20 of the Charter to the extent that an apartment owner or lessee may be deprived of the right to use the apartment for short-stay accommodation.

Any deprivation of property pursuant to these OC Act amendments would be in accordance with the law and would not be arbitrary. Special resolutions require the agreement of 75 per cent of the total lot entitlements of all lots in the owners corporation. Further, disputes about rule breaches, including whether rules were validly made, may be referred to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal for resolution. Any limit on the right to property under these provisions is justified as allowing owners corporations to make rules regarding the use of lots for short stay accommodation is directly related to the purpose of the Bill to promote the return of residential property to the long-term rental market. The amendments further protect the amenity of properties governed by the owners corporation for owners and residents. There are no less restrictive means available to achieve the objectives of the amendments.

TA Act investigative powers of tax officers

The TA Act will apply to the Bill. Part 9 of the TA Act provides authorised officers with investigation powers to administer and enforce taxation laws. Section 20 of the Charter is relevant to a number of powers which provide for authorised officers to enter certain premises, and to seize or take items. These powers are discussed in detail below in relation to the right to privacy.

The powers of an authorised officer include, under section 76 of the TA Act, the power to seize a document or thing where the officer has reason to believe or suspect it is necessary to do so to prevent its concealment, loss, destruction or alteration. Similarly, section 81 of the TA Act provides that an authorised officer may seize a storage device and the equipment necessary to access information on the device if the authorised officer believes, on reasonable grounds, that the storage device contains information relevant to the administration of a taxation law and it is not otherwise practicable to access the information on the device.

Sections 76 and 81 of the TA Act, as they will apply to the SSL, do not limit the right in section 20 of the Charter because they are sufficiently confined and structured, accessible, and formulated precisely such that any deprivation occurs in accordance with the law. Further, these provisions guard against any permanent interference with property where no offence has been committed. For example, the TA Act provides that reasonable steps must be taken to return a document or thing that is seized if the reason for its seizure no longer exists (section 84), and the document or thing seized must be returned within the retention period of 60 days, unless the retention period is extended by an order of the Magistrates Court (section 85).

Right to privacy: section 13

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their private life, free from interference. This right applies to the collection of personal information by public authorities. An unlawful or arbitrary interference to an individual's privacy will limit this right.

Obligation to provide SSL liability information

Clauses 17 and 18 of the Bill require those liable to pay SSL to register with the Commissioner, lodge returns, and pay the requisite tax. Returns are to be in the form, and contain the information, determined by the Commissioner. Clause 20 of the Bill requires registered SSL payers to notify the Commissioner if, because

of a change in circumstances, the registered SSL payer is no longer incurring a liability for the SSL and does not expect to incur any such liability in the future.

Clause 21 of the Bill requires an owner to provide a booking platform provider with a declaration under the section if a premises is not short stay accommodation.

Not all information required to be provided in a return or declaration will be personal information. However, to the extent that the collection of personal information may result in interference with a person's privacy, any such interference will be lawful and not arbitrary. These provisions do not require that a person's personal information be published, and only require the provision of information necessary to achieve the purpose of taxation administration.

TA Act investigative powers of tax officers and secrecy provisions

The investigative powers of the Commissioner and authorised tax officers will apply to the administration of the SSL. The following investigation powers may engage the right to privacy, as well as the right not to impart information, which forms part of the right to freedom of expression under section 15 of the Charter:

- Section 73 of the TA Act provides that the Commissioner may, by written notice, require a person to provide the Commissioner with information, produce a document or thing in the person's possession, or to attend and give evidence under oath.
- Section 76 of the TA Act which provides for entering and searching premises, as outlined above.
- Section 77 of the TA Act provides that an authorised officer may apply to a magistrate for a search warrant in relation to a premises, including a residence, if the authorised officer considers on reasonable grounds that there is, or may be within the next 72 hours, on the premises a particular thing that may be relevant to the administration or execution of a taxation law.
- Section 81 of the TA Act which provides for obtaining information from a storage device, as outlined above.
- Section 86 of the TA Act provides that an authorised officer may, to the extent it is reasonably necessary to do so for the administration or execution of a taxation law, require a person to give information, produce or provide documents and things, and give reasonable assistance, to the authorised officer.

In each provision that permits investigators to exercise powers of entry and search, the powers of investigators and other authorised persons are clearly set out in the TA Act and are strictly confined by reference to their purpose. They are also subject to appropriate legislative safeguards.

Section 92 of the TA Act permits a tax officer to make certain disclosures of information obtained in the administration of a taxation law. Specifically, section 92(1) permits the disclosure of such information for several different purposes, including in accordance with a requirement imposed under an Act, in connection with the administration or execution of a taxation law, to an authorised recipient such as the Ombudsman or a police officer of or above the rank of Inspector, or in connection with the administration of a legal proceeding arising out of a recognised law.

Consequential amendments to section 92(1) of the TA Act pursuant to clause 32 of the Bill will further permit disclosures of information obtained under or in relation to the Bill to a Council for the purpose of regulating short stay accommodation.

The types of information that may be disclosed include, but are not limited to, information regarding land ownership, tax liabilities and payments by taxpayers, taxation defaults by taxpayers, and applications for objection, appeal and review under Part 10 of the TA Act by taxpayers.

Permitted disclosures are strictly confined to their legitimate purposes and are subject to considerable legislative safeguards. In particular, section 94 of the TA Act prohibits 'secondary disclosure', that is, on-disclosure of any information provided by a tax officer under section 92, unless it is for the purpose of enforcing a law or protecting public revenue and the Commissioner has consented, or a disclosure made with the consent of the person to whom the information relates (or at the request of a person acting on behalf of that person). Further, section 95 provides that an authorised officer is not required to disclose or produce in court any such information unless it is necessary for the purposes of the administration of a taxation law, or to enable a person to exercise a function imposed on the person by law.

Further, the amendments to section 92(1) of the TA Act ensure that the Commissioner and municipal councils can exercise their respective regulatory and administrative functions in accordance with legislation.

Accordingly, to the extent that these provisions could interfere with a person's privacy, any interference would not constitute an unlawful or arbitrary interference.

Freedom of movement: section 12*TA Act investigative powers*

Section 12 of the Charter provides that every person lawfully within Victoria has the right to move freely within Victoria. As the SSL will be administered under the TA Act, the administration of SSL may involve the exercise of the investigative powers provided in section 73 of the TA Act. These investigative powers may also be exercised in relation to the collection of reportable information under Part 9 of the TA Act.

As set out above, the administration of the SSL may involve the exercise of investigative powers provided in section 73 of the TA Act. Among other things, this section provides that the Commissioner or an authorised officer may exercise their power to direct a natural person to attend and give evidence in relation to a matter. Accordingly, a person's right to move freely within Victoria may be engaged.

Although the power to compel a person to attend a particular place at a particular time may limit a person's freedom to choose to be elsewhere at that time, this differs qualitatively from the types of measures that Victorian courts have regarded as engaging the right to freedom of movement, such as restrictions placed on a person's place of residence, or ability to leave their residence, and police powers to conduct a traffic stop.

To the extent that section 73 of the TA Act limits the right of freedom of movement, any such limit is demonstrably justified under section 7(2) of the Charter, as the Commissioner's power to compel a person's attendance to give evidence will in certain circumstances be essential to obtain the information needed for the proper administration of the SSL, and for the collection of reportable information in accordance with the TA Act.

Right to fair hearing: section 24(1)*TA Act review processes*

The right to a fair hearing is protected under section 24 of the Charter which provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to a fair hearing. The right to a fair hearing applies to both courts and tribunals, such as the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Generally, the right to a fair hearing is concerned with procedural fairness and access to a court or tribunal, rather than the substantive fairness of a decision of a court or tribunal determined on the merits of a case.

Clause 33 of the Bill inserts a new subsection (14) into section 135 of the TA Act to provide that it is the intention of sections 5, 12(4), 18(1), 96(2) and 100(4) of the TA Act, as those sections apply after the commencement of the Bill, to alter or vary section 85 of the *Constitution Act 1975*. These provisions preclude the Supreme Court from entertaining proceedings of a kind to which these sections apply, except as provided by those sections.

Section 5 of the TA Act defines the meaning of a non-reviewable decision in relation to the TA Act. 'Non-reviewable' is referred to in sections 12(4) and 100(4) of the TA Act.

The reason for limiting the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court in relation to a compromise assessment under section 12 of the TA Act is that agreement has been reached between the Commissioner and a taxpayer on the taxpayer's liability, and the purpose of section 12 would not be achieved if a compromise assessment were reviewable.

Section 18 of the TA Act establishes a refund application procedure, adherence to which is a condition precedent to taking any further action for recovering refunds. The purpose of the provisions is to give the Commissioner the opportunity to consider a refund application before any collateral legal action can be taken. The purpose of these provisions would not be achieved if the Commissioner's actions were subject to review.

Division 1 of Part 10 of the TA Act establishes an exclusive code for dealing with objections, and this Division will apply where the Commissioner issues an assessment for SSL. This code establishes the rights of objectors in a statutory framework and precludes any collateral actions for review of the Commissioner's assessment. The objections and appeals provisions of Part 10 of the TA Act establish that review of assessments is only to be undertaken in accordance with an exclusive code identified in that Part. The purpose of these provisions would not be achieved if any question concerning an assessment was subject to judicial review except such judicial review as provided by Division 2, Part 10 of the TA Act.

A power is provided to the Commissioner under section 100 of the TA Act, which provides the Commissioner with discretion to allow an objection to be lodged even though it is out of time. This decision is non-reviewable to ensure the efficient administration of the TA Act and to enable outstanding issues relating to assessments to be concluded expeditiously.

To the extent that limiting the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court may limit a natural person's fair hearing rights as protected under section 24(1) of the Charter, any such limit would be demonstrably justified. The classification of certain decisions under the TA Act as 'non-reviewable' is directly related to the particular statutory purpose and context of those particular decisions, and the TA Act provides an alternative regime for

dealing with objections, which is necessary for the efficient discharge of the Commissioner's functions under the TA Act.

Presumption of innocence: section 25(1)

The right in section 25(1) is engaged where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that the accused person is not guilty of an offence.

TA Act defence of reasonable excuse

The TA Act will apply to the SSL. The right to be presumed innocent may be considered relevant to strict liability offences in the TA Act which place an evidential burden on the defendant to rely on a defence such as the defence of honest and reasonable mistake.

Section 73 of the TA Act empowers the Commissioner to issue a written notice requiring a person to provide information, produce a document or thing, or give evidence. Section 73A provides that the Commissioner may certify to the Supreme Court that a person has failed to comply with a requirement of a notice issued under section 73. The Supreme Court may inquire into the case and may order the person to comply with the requirement in the notice. Section 73A(4) provides that a person who, without reasonable excuse, fails to comply with an order of the Supreme Court under section 73A(2), is guilty of an offence.

Section 88 of the TA Act makes it an offence for a person, without reasonable excuse, to refuse or fail to comply with a requirement made or to answer a question of an authorised officer asked in accordance with sections 81 or 86 of the TA Act.

Section 90 of the TA Act establishes a defence of reasonable compliance for offences relating to the investigation powers of authorised officers under Part 9 of the TA Act. It provides that a person is not guilty of an offence if the court hearing the charge is satisfied that the person could not, by the exercise of reasonable diligence, have complied with the requirement to which the charge relates, or that the person complied with the requirement to the extent that he or she was able to do so.

TA Act failure to exercise due diligence

The right to be presumed innocent is also relevant to section 130C of the TA Act. Section 130C of the TA Act establishes the criminal liability of an officer of a body corporate for the failure to exercise due diligence in certain circumstances, and which imposes a legal burden of proof on that officer. Section 130C provides that if a body corporate commits a specified offence, such as giving false or misleading information to tax officers contrary to section 57(1), or tax evasion contrary to section 61, an officer of the body corporate is also deemed to have committed the offence.

Section 130C(3) provides that it is a defence to a charge for an officer of a body corporate to prove that they exercised due diligence to prevent the commission of the offence by the body corporate.

The defence in 130C(3) of the TA Act imposes a legal burden on the defendant. The imposition of a legal burden to rely on the defence of due diligence is compatible with the right to presumption of innocence in section 25(1) of the Charter, as any limits on the right will be reasonably justified under section 7(2) of the Charter. Section 130C applies only to a narrow range of offences of dishonesty, and only to officers of a body corporate as persons who carry on a specific role and possess significant authority and influence over the body corporate.

The purpose of these provisions is to ensure compliance with the SSL by deterring intentional acts of dishonesty in the administration of the SSL. A person who elects to undertake a position as officer of a body corporate accepts that they will be subject to certain requirements under the Bill and the TA Act and will be expected to be able to demonstrate their compliance with these requirements. This includes the expectation that an officer of a body corporate can demonstrate compliance with a requirement to exercise due diligence to prevent the commission of these offences of dishonesty by the body corporate taxpayer. Moreover, whether an officer of a body corporate has exercised due diligence is a matter peculiarly within the knowledge of that person. Further, a defence is available for the benefit of an accused to escape liability where they have taken reasonable steps to ensure compliance in respect of what could otherwise be an absolute or strict liability offence.

Conclusion on presumption of innocence

Although these provisions require a defendant to raise evidence of a matter to rely on a defence, it imposes an evidential, rather than legal burden.

Courts in other jurisdictions have generally taken the approach that an evidential onus on a defendant to raise a defence does not limit the presumption of innocence. The defences and excuses provided relate to matters within the knowledge of the defendant, which is appropriate in circumstances where placing the onus on the

prosecution would involve the proof of a negative which would be very difficult. These provisions of the TA Act are compatible with the right to the presumption of innocence protected by the Charter.

Rights in criminal proceedings: section 25(2)(k)

TA Act investigative powers

Section 25(2)(k) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence is entitled not to be compelled to testify against himself or herself or to confess guilt. The Supreme Court has held that this right, as protected by the Charter, is at least as broad as the common law privilege against self-incrimination. It applies to protect a charged person against the admission in subsequent criminal proceedings of incriminatory material obtained under compulsion, regardless of whether the information was obtained prior to or subsequent to the charge being laid. The common law privilege includes immunity against both direct use and derivative use of compelled testimony.

Section 86 of the TA Act, which will apply to the SSL, is outlined above. It is an offence to fail to comply with a requirement made or to answer a question under this section. Section 87(1) limits the right to protection against self-incrimination by providing that a person is not excused from answering a question, providing information, or producing a document or thing on the ground that to do so might tend to incriminate the person or make the person liable to a penalty. Section 87(2) provides that, if a person objects to answering a question, providing information, or producing a document or thing, the answer, information, document or thing is not admissible in any criminal proceeding other than proceedings for an offence against a taxation law, or proceedings for an offence in the nature of perjury.

Section 87(1) of the TA Act is a reasonable limit on the right to protection against self-incrimination under section 7(2) of the Charter. The ability of an authorised officer to require a person to give information or answer questions will be necessary for the proper administration of the SSL. Section 87(2) of the TA Act only authorises the admission of evidence obtained under section 87(1) in an offence against a taxation law, or proceedings for perjury, and otherwise preserves both the direct use immunity and derivative use immunity. This section directly promotes the objective of the TA Act, which is to facilitate the administration and enforcement of Victoria's taxation laws and is a significant public purpose.

Further, with respect to the power of an authorised officer to require the production of documents, I note that at common law, the protection accorded to the compelled production of pre-existing documents is considerably weaker than the protection accorded to oral testimony or to documents brought into existence to comply with a request for information.

There are no less restrictive means available to achieve the purpose of enabling the proper administration of the SSL, as providing an immunity that applies to the offence of perjury or an offence under the SSL or the TA Act would unreasonably obstruct the role of the authorised person to investigate compliance with the SSL.

Conclusion

For these reasons, in my opinion, the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the rights contained in sections 12, 13, 20, 24(1), 25(1) and 25(2)(k) of the Charter.

TIM PALLAS MP
Treasurer

Section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975

Tim PALLAS: I wish to make a statement under section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975 of the reasons for altering or varying that section by the Short Stay Levy Bill 2024.

Section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975 vests the judicial power of Victoria in the Supreme Court and requires a statement to be made when legislation that directly or indirectly repeals, alters or varies the court's jurisdiction is introduced. Clause 33 of the bill inserts a new subsection (14) into section 135 of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to provide that it is the intention of sections 5, 12(4), 18(1), 96(2) and 100(4) of the Taxation Administration Act 1997, as those sections apply after the commencement of that clause, to alter or vary section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975.

The bill introduces the new short-stay levy. Part 6 of the bill makes consequential amendments to the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to enable the SSL, consistent with other state taxes, to be administered under the Taxation Administration Act 1997 and any regulations made under it.

The Supreme Court's jurisdiction is altered to the extent that the Taxation Administration Act 1997 provides for certain non-reviewable decisions and establishes an exclusive code that prevents proceedings concerning an assessment or refund or recovery of tax being commenced except as provided by that act. It is desirable that the legislative regime under the Taxation Administration Act 1997 applies to the SSL in the same way as it does to other taxes administered under the Taxation Administration Act 1997.

Accordingly, in order to ensure that the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court is limited in relation to the SSL in the same way as it is in relation to other Victorian taxes, it is necessary to provide that it is the intention of this bill, for the relevant provisions of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to apply to the administration of the SSL, and for the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to be altered accordingly.

Section 5 of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 defines the meaning of 'non-reviewable decision' in relation to that act, which will also apply to the SSL. No court, including the Supreme Court, has jurisdiction or power to entertain any question as to the validity or correctness of a non-reviewable decision.

Section 12(4) of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 provides that the making of a compromise assessment is a non-reviewable decision. Similarly, section 100(4) provides that a decision by the commissioner of state revenue not to permit an objection to be lodged out of time is a non-reviewable decision. Decisions may be made under section 12(4) or section 100(4) in relation to the SSL.

Section 18(1) of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 prevents proceedings being commenced in the Supreme Court for the refund or recovery of a tax except as provided in part 4 of the Taxation Administration Act 1997. As the SSL will be a tax for the purposes of section 18(1), proceedings for its refund or recovery will be similarly limited.

Section 96(2) of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 prevents a court, including the Supreme Court, considering any question concerning an assessment of a tax except as provided by part 10 of the Taxation Administration Act 1997. As the SSL will be a tax for the purposes of section 96(2), proceedings in relation to any assessment of SSL would be similarly limited.

To ensure that the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court is limited in relation to the SSL in the same way as it is in relation to other taxes administered under the Taxation Administration Act 1997, it is necessary to provide that it is the intention of sections 5, 12(4), 18(1), 96(2) and 100(4) of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to alter or vary section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975.

I commend the bill to the house.

Second reading

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (10:49): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows:

In our *Housing Statement* last September, the Government recognised the issues with adequate access to long-term rental properties across the state, particularly in regional Victoria.

To encourage the return of more properties to the long-term rental market, this Bill introduces a levy on short stay accommodation booking fees, for bookings made on and after 1 January 2025.

While short stay accommodation has become a popular feature of Victoria's visitor economy, it has reduced the ability for many properties to be used for longer-term accommodation. When residential properties are used for short stay accommodation they cannot be made available as longer-term accommodation.

This is why we are taking action on short stay accommodation, as part of our plan to unlock housing supply and improve housing affordability pressures felt throughout Victoria.

The short stay levy will fund Homes Victoria to support their important work in building and maintaining social and affordable housing across the state. Revenue collected from the levy will go to Homes Victoria with 25% of funds to be invested in regional Victoria.

The Commissioner of State Revenue (Commissioner) and the State Revenue Office (SRO) will administer the Levy under the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* (TAA).

The Bill will also amend the *Owners Corporations Act 2006* to address the provision of short stay accommodation in strata developments.

Liability for levy

The levy will apply to each booking of accommodation premises for a short stay of less than 28 days made on or after 1 January 2025.

As the liability arises when a guest completes the short stay, there is no levy if a booking is cancelled prior to the booked dates. If a guest does not cancel the booking but never commences the stay, the levy does apply.

In general, all short stays in properties such as houses and apartments will be liable for the levy. The levy will also apply to short stay accommodation in separate residences, such as cabins and granny flats. The levy applies whether the whole or a part of premises is being rented out for short stays.

Transitional arrangements will be in place so that all bookings made prior to 1 January 2025 will not be liable for the levy, even if the stay ends on or after 1 January 2025.

Principal places of residence

If premises are occupied as the principal place of residence of the owner or renter of the premises, a short stay in that premises will not be subject to the levy. For example, a room made available for short stays in an owner's or renter's principal place of residence will not have a levy liability. However, if accommodation is provided in a separate dwelling at the same property this will be subject to the levy.

A principal place of residence is not defined in the Act but it is a concept common to other taxes and schemes administered by the SRO, such as in the relevant eligibility criteria for the First Home Owner Grant and certain concessions and exemptions from land transfer duty and land tax. The meaning of principal place of residence is derived from well-developed common law principles. However, the Bill provides that in determining whether premises are occupied as a principal place of residence of an owner or renter, regard must be had to every place of residence of that person. In the case of renters, it is also a requirement that the residential rental agreement be made in good faith and not for the purpose of avoiding the levy.

Commercial accommodation

The Bill specifically excludes commercial residential properties as defined under Commonwealth GST legislation from the levy base, such as hotels, motels, resorts, hostels, caravan parks and similar accommodation. Commercial accommodation cannot generally be used for long-term residential occupation and is often subject to strict regulatory arrangements.

Other exclusions

The levy will also not be applied to residential student accommodation, rooming houses, retirement villages, residential care facilities, supported residential services, temporary crisis accommodation and accommodation provided by facilities to their employees, contractors or clients. As with commercial accommodation, these types of premises are not considered suitable for long-term rental or for sale on the housing market.

Payment of levy

In most cases the levy will be payable by providers of booking platforms.

A booking platform is defined as a person who carries on a business that facilitates and accepts bookings for short stays, regardless of whether the platform facilitates payment.

If a person uses a booking platform to arrange short stays, the platform provider is responsible for paying the levy to the extent of any stays booked through them.

However, owners and renters are responsible for paying the levy in respect of any direct bookings – that is, bookings they arrange themselves without the use of a booking platform.

Liable parties must register with the Commissioner and lodge regular returns in relation to all short stays provided during the return period. For larger levy payers with annual total booking fees above \$75,000, returns must be lodged after the end of each quarter commencing on 1 January, 1 April, 1 July and 1 October. However, if annual total booking fees are \$75,000 or less, returns are only required annually after the end of each calendar year. The different return periods will ease the administrative burden on smaller taxpayers. Payment of the levy is due 30 days after the end of the return period.

The rate of the levy is 7.5% of total booking fees for each completed short stay. Total booking fees are inclusive of GST and cleaning fees, as well as amounts waived, refunded or credited for cancelled short stay bookings, but exclude credit card fees and payment surcharges.

Joint and several liability

If a booking platform is used to provide short stay accommodation claimed by the owner or renter to be outside the scope of the levy – for example, because the accommodation is provided in their principal place of residence – they are required to provide a declaration of this to the booking platform.

If this declaration is later found to be incorrect, both the owner and booking platform will be jointly and severally liable for any shortfall in levy payments. The booking platform will have the right to recover any levy amounts paid by them, from the property owner.

Licensees and occupants

The Bill requires licensees or other exclusive occupants of premises (who are not renters), who provide short stay accommodation through direct bookings, to pay amounts to the owner sufficient to cover the levy liability payable, plus GST and any interest or penalty tax payable. If these amounts are not paid the owner will have the right to recover the amount from the licensee or occupant.

Taxation administration

The Bill amends the TAA to make the new Act a taxation law under the TAA. This will give the Commissioner and the SRO the power to administer the levy using the same framework that applies to other taxation laws. This includes the ability to issue assessments, pay refunds, impose penalties and interest on tax defaults, recover unpaid levies, carry out investigations and consider objections. A person assessed for the levy will have entitlements to object to the levy assessment similarly to other taxpayers, as well as rights of refund, review and appeal.

The TAA is also amended to permit the Commissioner to disclose certain levy payer information collected through administering the levy to councils for the purpose of regulation of short stay accommodation activity. The information permitted to be disclosed is expected to include matters such as property owner names and addresses and relevant details about short stay bookings. All disclosures will be subject to the strict terms of the taxpayer secrecy provisions of the TAA. This includes strict conditions to limit the secondary disclosure of information that councils receive from the Commissioner.

Owners corporations

The Bill amends the Owners Corporations Act 2006 to address the provision of short stay accommodation in strata developments. Specifically, the Bill authorises owners corporations to make rules to prohibit the use of lots as short stay accommodation.

This new rule making power will only impact lots in a strata development that are not the principal place of residence of the lot owner or the principal place of residence of a lessee or sublessee of the lot owner, such as a renter under a residential rental agreement.

In addition, an owners corporation rule prohibiting the use of lots as short stay accommodation will be of no effect if the rule is inconsistent with any other Act or law of the state, including relevant local government planning provisions.

This new rule making power may assist in diverting residential lots from the short-stay market to the longer term residential accommodation market, providing additional choice for Victorian renters, and it will also provide an additional option to owners corporations that are concerned at the amenity impact on residents of a strata development flowing from the use of properties as short stay accommodation.

Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Victoria

I draw the members' attention specifically to clause 33 of the Bill. This clause proposes to limit the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to ensure that the legislative regime under the TAA applies to short stay levy in the same way as it does in relation to any other taxation law. Accordingly, I provide a statement under section 85(5) of the *Constitution Act 1975* of the reasons for altering or varying that section by this Bill.

The introduction of the levy and the new powers for owners corporations in this Bill will provide incentive to property owners to transition residential properties away from short term accommodation and towards the longer-term rental market, helping to reduce rental prices and vacancy rates, and increase the availability and affordability of rental housing for all Victorians.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:49): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 11 September.

Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:49): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. The bill will amend the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and the Funerals Act 2006, and it will provide for prescribed forms of part 4A site agreements – which are standardised forms – changes in rent calculation formulae and various other, minor, amendments. It also seeks more transparency from funeral directors to ensure customers who are at their most vulnerable are shown clearly the costs associated with funeral arrangements. I do not know if anybody else in this room sees the irony in the fact that this government is seeking more transparency from small business when it goes out of its way to hide whatever it possibly can of its financial mismanagement. It is more ‘Do as I say’ than ‘Do as I do’.

The bill introduces a requirement for funeral homes to include service and coffin price lists on their websites and also in a prominent place in their parlours. When people come in we know they are at their most vulnerable and are upset. We want to make sure that price lists and everything that is included are easily accessible, either on the web or in their office.

It is pretty straightforward, this bill. There are only eight pages of legislative change when you take out the end notes, the table of provisions and the title, so there is not a lot in here. I do want to place on record that the opposition does not oppose this bill. As with many of Labor’s recent bits of legislation, the devil could be in the detail later on in the regulations, but we are not opposing this bill.

I further note that the two peak industry bodies, both VicParks – the Victorian Caravan Parks Association – and the Australian Funeral Directors Association, the AFDA, do not oppose the bill and indeed have already implemented many of the changes that are contained within it. So the heavy lifting has already been done, and this will tidy it up for those who are not in the AFDA or who are not in VicParks, which I will go to in a bit more detail.

As the Victorian housing crisis deepens, Victorians are helpless to combat the lack of housing in this state. As the target of 800,000 homes over 10 years is turning into another Labor farce, there are significant numbers of people who are shifting out of the family home and looking at residential parks. I just want to pick up where the Leader of the House spoke about vulnerable people. I understand that some of those living in caravan parks fall into that vulnerable list, but there are plenty who make a lifestyle choice to go into these leisure villages. They are houses that have been built on someone else’s property and they rent that land, which obviously makes it a bit cheaper for them. I would not say they are vulnerable, but certainly they are making a lifestyle choice.

When we look at those leisure parks and caravan parks, the dwelling, or the chattel, is owned by the person who buys that property and then they rent the land component, which makes it significantly cheaper. You can imagine that if people are nearing their retirement age and their superannuation is not in great shape, they can sell their house in the suburbs – it might be a million or a million and a half; I am just putting it out there as a number. People can sell a house that they may have paid for over the years if they do not have much super, move into a residential park – we have got them in Cobram, we have got them in Shepparton; many regions have got these residential parks – and buy

into that and own a property for about \$300,000 or \$320,000. It is a win-win. It certainly helps them top up their superannuation and gives them affordable housing that they can live in, so there certainly are some benefits in that.

I am reliably told that there are currently about 10,000 people who live in these residential parks or leisure parks, and there are about to be another 12,000 in the next five years, so clearly it is important to get the contracts right. That is what this bill is about: consistency and standardisation of contracts. Consumer Affairs Victoria seems to be a toothless tiger at the moment. Getting things right before people sign a contract is much better than getting it wrong and then having to go and see consumer affairs.

On 15 July this year the Minister for Consumer Affairs released a statement outlining the government's plan to protect Victorians living in residential parks to:

... ensure all site agreements are in a standard form and key information is disclosed ahead of entering into an agreement so rights and obligations are clear to residents and site owners.

Again, I think that is a positive step forward. The release also states that further details 'will be developed in consultation with industry, residents and other key stakeholders' again highlighting that we will not know the full impacts on industry until regulation is introduced. As I say, I hope the government works with us and the industry to make sure that standardised form is what we are seeking.

Amendments to the Funerals Act 2006 have come about due to changes in legislation in other states. Over the past few years it has forced Victoria to introduce this bill to ensure these requirements are broadly similar and allow a seamless experience for those living either in our state or out of our state and those living in cross-border communities. Victoria has been compared to New South Wales or South Australia. We want to be on the same page, and unless you live in a cross-border community, like I do, you may not fully understand how little regulations and little changes in circumstances between Victoria and New South Wales can make a massive difference. People moving into leisure villages or caravan parks want to see consistency, because sometimes to find one of those it may be just over the border – for me, Cobram and Barooga or Yarrawonga and Mulwala – anywhere down the Murray River and of course the South Australian border as well. As noted, the industry has no objections to the bill, and AFDA, the Australian Funeral Directors Association, have already implemented similar for their members across Australia. In many cases it happens already, so impacts will be minimal.

I want to talk about some of the main provisions. The bill will provide standard forms to be used by part 4A site agreements, increasing transparency and allowing for more comparisons across the industry, and it will clearly define CPI as the Melbourne-based CPI, not any other ABS CPI measurement as used in rent calculations. It will require funeral homes to display price lists on their website and in their premises. The residential tenancy sector is a vast and sometimes confusing area, and residential parks are a very unknown area. But as I say, with the housing crisis and cost-of-living crisis there will be a major shift, and we have been told that will double what is currently there. That is just in the next five years, and it could go even higher.

There is a difference between a part 4 tenant and a part 4A tenant, and that stems from what part of the Residential Tenancies Act they come under. In essence part 4 of the Residential Tenancies Act states that it applies to anyone who is a resident of a caravan park with a caravan that is a movable dwelling. We have all seen those caravans in caravan parks that may not even have any wheels on them. But it is still a caravan, and it has got a permanent annexe. Some people use them for holiday houses; some people use them as a full-time residence. In fact the member for Melton had a caravan, didn't he, at one stage down somewhere. I think he borrowed one, used one or said he had one. But the member for Melton certainly took advantage of the second residence allowance for the caravan.

Danny Pearson interjected.

Tim McCURDY: The former member for Melton, correct. It is the former. We should not forget the former member for Melton. Anyway, it applies to anyone who resides in a part 4A dwelling or a part 4A site, as I said before, without owning the dwelling wholly or in part. So a part 4A is when the landowner leases the land to the person and owns their own part 4A dwelling. To make things simple, a part 4A dwelling could be a portable house or a caravan on blocks. Again, to quote Consumer Affairs:

People who live in a residential park (such as a caravan park or lifestyle village) and own their home, often have what are called Part 4A site agreements.

These agreements cover the land that is being rented for the home. Part 4A agreements only apply to a home that can be moved, such as a pre-fab home or cabin.

Part 4A agreements do not apply to other movable homes that can be registered with VicRoads, such as caravans or camper trailers.

That is the fundamental difference between a part 4 tenant and a part 4A tenant. The general working theory is that these dwellings could be picked up and moved within 24 hours, and that is the difference, or three business days.

As with the terms of residential parks, they are covered by that part 4A agreement and, as I say, can range from a simple caravan park to a leisure village. Leisure villages can provide an excellent lifestyle choice for those who are reaching retirement age. As I mentioned, if your superannuation is a little lower, there is an opportunity for people to get into comfortable housing with a roof over their head and still top up their superannuation. The peak body, VicParks, represent around 5500 to 6000 of the site agreements in Victoria. According to their data the average age of a person moving to a part 4A dwelling is mid to late 50s, considerably younger than for retirement villages, which sits around the mid-70s. With a target of 12,000 new site agreements in place over the next five years, we are seeing this sector explode, as it offers a more affordable and flexible way to retire.

By selling off their home, retirees can supplement their superannuation and also become eligible for Commonwealth rent assistance because they are no longer asset rich. The selling of housing stock will also trickle down the chain by allowing second and third home owners to upgrade, thus freeing up more housing stock for first home buyers, even though we know that Labor seems to have moved away from giving people the opportunity of home ownership. With only 12,000 potentially freed-up houses, this is still only scratching the surface. VicParks, the peak body, assures us that this target will enable Victoria to catch up to New South Wales and Queensland, who are miles in front of us when it comes to these parks. They have been targeted at the baby boomer generation. There are many more people in New South Wales and Queensland who use these registered parks, and Victoria is lagging behind.

Unfortunately under Labor the price of housing in regional Victoria has gone up by nearly 50 per cent in four years. Metro houses have increased by 41 per cent in the last two years, and in some cases units have increased by about \$100,000 in the same period. At the moment the government is in a lather, looking for a way to free up housing so we can get a roof over their head for many people. I know in my electorate of Ovens Valley we are very light on for housing and very light on for public housing. I tell everybody who comes into my office and has concerns about trying to find public housing that if they have a property, I urge them, do not leave that property. If you have to pay another \$5 or \$10 a week, let us work out how we can do that, because getting another house is impractical. It just will not happen. I am encouraging and imploring people to stay in the house they have got, if they can, at all costs. That is no surprise to anybody. We are all in the same situation throughout metropolitan Melbourne or regional Victoria.

The median housing price for the whole metro and regional area does not highlight the increases in some of the individual towns, like Bright in my electorate – the beautiful town of Bright that people love to come and enjoy, with everything that it has to offer. Houses in Bright have increased over 115 per cent, from an average of \$585,000 to \$1.3 million in the last five years, so it is not unreasonable

that there is a housing issue, with people trying to find a property to live in. Many are holiday houses and the value has gone up. Bright is certainly not a place where you are going to find first home owners in the near term. If Labor want to free up housing stock for first home buyers rather than locking them into that perpetual cycle of renting and insecurity, they need to get more serious about their other developments as well. Too often we rely on the hardworking taxpayer to get them out of the mess.

The main changes that will be introduced under the amendments in this bill are requirements for all part 4A site agreements to use a standard form, and that is a form we have not seen yet. I did ask during the department briefing, and I appreciate the briefing that we received. That form has not been designed or made yet, although there are forms that operate within the industry. As I say, VicParks do that for their registered caravan parks now. Not everybody is a member of VicParks, obviously. Ninety-eight per cent of registered caravan parks are part of VicParks, so it is fair to say 98 per cent of people moving into registered caravan parks are using a form already. But I would certainly have liked to have seen what that form is and made sure that there are no little taxes or charges associated with it, or a little government lick along the way as it goes through, to make sure these forms are pretty similar to what the industry currently already has. The Victorian government will finalise the details of this form in regulation, let us hope, after consultation with the industry and stakeholders. VicParks, as I say, already use their own standardised form for their members, and that is 98 per cent of the residential park industry. They are optimistic they will be closely involved in the process. The minister would be foolish to not include them, as any changes will impact on the work that they are doing.

The change to standardised forms will improve transparency in the industry and allow for potential part 4A residents to compare the offering of one residential park directly with another. That is clearly what we want to be able to do – simple and straightforward so that people do not get trapped. We know in retirement villages the concerns are out there at the moment about the up-front costs, the fees that are associated and the difference between one retirement village and another. So let us hope we do not make the same mistake in this legislation that we are bringing forward today. It will hopefully avoid that because it will be one form fits all. Whether you are going into a residential park in Geelong, Ballarat, Cobram, Shepparton, metro Melbourne or wherever it might be, one form will fit all. This will increase that transparency, which I spoke about before, and will catch out any operators who are not doing things aboveboard. It will make a complex document clearer for the regular Victorian. That is what is anticipated and what we are told will happen. The government has advised that the standard form will be available through Consumer Affairs Victoria. The only change of note is the introduction of a Melbourne-based CPI factor in rental calculation, and that is to avoid any other ABS-provided CPI metric being used, as I mentioned earlier, as that could lead to incorrect rental adjustments. I note this change is also fully supported by the industry.

I want to touch on the Funerals Act amendment. The changes to the Funerals Act are straightforward and relatively minor. The requirement placed on funeral homes will likewise be minimal, as most funeral homes already have forms and the pricing either on their website or very easily accessible in their office. These lists are available, and they will only need to be updated on their website and to ensure that their list meets the requirements. But as noted, it is the industry standard practice to have a pricing list, resulting in a small impact on those under the Australian Funeral Directors Association, and the very small number of funeral directors outside of AFDA will be supported in implementing the changes. So again, like VicParks, a majority of funeral directors are associated with AFDA, and currently this is best practice or normal practice if you are a member of AFDA. All this will do is tidy it up to see that every funeral director, regardless of whether they are with AFDA or not, will still have to display their price list for coffins, funeral arrangements and so forth.

It will benefit Victorians by providing greater transparency in a time of great strain and grief for families. We know if you are turning up at a funeral parlour, it is not the happiest time in your life. It is about having all those facts and prices at your fingertips so you can make a calculated decision with the pressure that is already on you being at the funeral parlour already.

The feedback given to us by AFDA is that they did note the bill is very high level and there is little information on the rollout and the timeframe for implementation. Again, this does sound familiar from the government. It comes out with the ideas, but we have got to make sure that those ideas are followed through and that the industry is consulted all the way through to make sure that what they are currently doing, which is what started all of this – the process and the forms that they currently use – is not altered greatly as we move forward. They have, however, offered to work with Consumer Affairs Victoria to ensure that all funeral directors are well informed and supported in rolling out the changes.

These sentiments were echoed by InvoCare Australia. InvoCare Australia is the largest funeral service provider in Australia, as many of us know, and I always crosscheck the information I get from different organisations by going to some of the local funeral directors. There is Mason Park with Glenn Bouchier there in Wangaratta and North East Funerals in Wangaratta with John and Christine Haddrick. I spoke with both of those about their thoughts on this bill, and again, they are fully supportive of the changes, provided the changes are in line with what is currently being done or do not alter too far from that.

This change will also give cross-border communities the chance to compare prices between businesses. I spoke about residential caravan parks. It is a significant issue in cross-border communities because sometimes it is a price difference, sometimes it is a regulation difference. There is always something different, and people move from community to community quite regularly. If you have lived in Mulwala, it is not uncommon to be living in Yarrawonga, on the Victorian side, a few years down the track, and vice versa – also in Cobram–Barooga and Echuca–Moama. So it is important in these cross-border communities that we try and have things as streamlined as we can so people can compare prices between businesses in different states.

As with the changes in the Residential Tenancies Act, the details will come out a bit later on. There is still a lack of scrutiny of the real impact of those changes, but as I say, we just hope that the government works with the industry. I also note there is no clear definition or idea on what a price list must include – this is for the funeral homes – and whether it is a detailed and itemised list of every single item and service provided or whether some items can be packaged together as funeral service items, because there are some costs associated with funerals that must be paid regardless, which some clients may be unaware of. So a price list must be clear about what prices have to be paid and what are in addition to those, and these changes will be regulated by Consumer Affairs. There is an expectation they will provide greater clarity around this once consultation with the industry has concluded.

I have nearly exhausted what is on the bill, so in concluding, as I mentioned, the opposition does not oppose the bill. We would have liked to have seen a bit more detail around some of the forms and the changes. As I say, only yesterday and today we have seen another tax get introduced. People are fearful that any change of a form to a standardised form or anything of that nature could end up being another tax, small or large. Again, when you are burying a loved one, you do not get much say in it; it has to happen. It has got to go ahead, and if a tax is introduced, well, there are some things that just have to be paid and we have to move forward. The industry has said to me that as long as it is in line with what current standards are, they are more than happy to go along. As I say, they are supportive of supplementing standard practice. The details will not have a substantial impact on their industry.

We are keen to see the residential park sector expand – obviously, with the housing crisis that we currently have – and keen to see the subsequent freeing up of additional housing stock for simple and clear regulations in that sector. As the details are finalised, I ask the minister to provide an opportunity for even the opposition to review and discuss them before they come into effect – and time will tell whether that happens or not – but certainly for the industry to do so as well. I also ask the minister to consider what I have said – to include the key stakeholders in the shaping of that regulation that is still to come. With that, I commend the bill to the house.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (11:14): I am pleased to make a contribution to the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. This bill gives Victorians more information when entering into

commercial agreements by requiring greater transparency from retailers. Transparency of information helps Victorians to make informed consumer choices, ensuring they get the best deal possible. The bill strengthens regulatory requirements for two sectors: residential parks and funeral homes and providers.

One of the reasons I was interested in making a contribution to this bill relates particularly to funeral pricing. Having been through this experience myself, when you are in the depths of grief there is often not enough emotional bandwidth to deal with some of the extraordinary costs associated with planning a funeral. I remember when my dear old Dad passed away, my brother and I were at the funeral home and we just thought, 'Mum's not going to be able to pay for this.' The pricing and the range of choices we had were baffling and also really hard to understand. I had a recent experience with the passing of a friend where we were trying to work out why a funeral would cost tens of thousands of dollars. I am pleased that we are making these reforms to address an area of consumer protection that has attracted scrutiny from all sides in recent times, because pricing transparency of funeral services is something that many Victorians are all too familiar with. When you are grieving the loss of a loved one, confusing or sometimes, sadly, even predatory behaviour in terms of funeral costs can add unnecessary anxiety and make a difficult time even harder.

CHOICE and the ACCC have both reported on practices within the funeral services industry in recent years. What these reports have made obvious – the misinformation, the misleading pricing structures, the bundling of goods and services that raise costs and limit choices, the unnecessary fees, the market concentration and the range of issues that compound the grief and suffering of Victorians during what is often the most challenging times of their lives – is actually quite appalling reading. Those of you who have had to bury a loved one know that the cost of a funeral service can be very distressing, and it adds to the stress, making a hard time even worse.

This bill brings Victoria in line with other jurisdictions, like New South Wales and Queensland, in increasing the transparency of funeral home pricing. It proposes amending the Funerals Act 2006 to require that funeral homes and service providers clearly display a price list for all goods and services, both online and in a prominent position within the retail outlet, the funeral home. Like changes to residential parks, which are also part of this bill, pricing of funeral services will need to be displayed in a prescribed form. This will make it far easier for consumers to compare pricing and ensure they get the best possible outcome. The Allan Labor government will continue to work with the industry and community stakeholders to develop a prescribed form that does not unnecessarily burden funeral service providers whilst also being as clear as possible for consumers. The bill will make failure to comply with the new regulations an offence which will carry a financial penalty of 60 penalty units. This is a significant penalty that reflects the severity of taking advantage of people at what may be one of the lowest points of their life.

This bill is about more than transparency and consumer protection. The loss of a loved one brings with it so many pressures and anxieties. The cost of their funeral should not be one of those pressures or anxieties. These reforms will make it easier for Victorians to celebrate the lives of their loved ones in the way that they would have wanted. In an ideal world businesses would not be taking advantage of grieving people. I am proud to be part of a Labor government that is committed to protecting the rights of Victorian consumers. Clearly displaying the prices of goods and services means consumers will be able to purchase the funeral arrangements that they and their loved ones want, not what the funeral homes' salespeople want.

In terms of residential parks, residential parks are commonly marketed as a lower cost or alternative accommodation option, particularly for older Victorians. Within a park, residents must own their own moveable dwelling. They can vary in size – most are similar in size to a demountable classroom. The lease size concerns where the dwelling is located.

The Allan Labor government has a long and proud record of increasing renters' rights and has more protections than any other state in the country. We are continuing to work with communities and advocacy groups to fill in the gaps, ensuring that all Victorians can access safe and secure housing.

The residential park and land lease market has grown significantly in recent years, and this growth has spurred more need for legislative reform and increased consumer protections. We are proud to continue an agenda that involves listening to communities and responding in kind to address their concerns. Currently site agreements, the residential park equivalent of a lease, are not required to be in a standard form, and they can vary across operators, making it hard for residents to easily compare terms and conditions. This makes it hard for prospective residents to know if they are getting the best deal or if the site will even meet their needs and requirements. This bill makes changes to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 by amending part 4A so that site agreements must now be standardised and in the prescribed form. Standardised site agreements make it harder for providers to provide unfair agreements. It will bring protections in line with those for other types of renters. Any financial matters, including but not limited to rent, bond, utilities or any other fee or charge, must be defined.

Rent increases must now be calculated using a specified formula or index, which must be clearly defined in the site agreement. The amendments also expand the type of information providers must disclose, including basic information such as the name and contact details of the site owner and the details of any representatives acting on behalf of the site owner. These changes mean that those wishing to enter into an agreement with a residential park operator will benefit from greater transparency across all matters, financial or otherwise. All tenants should be able to get the best deal possible and be certain that their needs will be met before signing any agreement. Strengthening protections and increasing information transparency is crucial to the success of diverse housing stock.

I am pleased that within this bill we are delivering for people who are in vulnerable situations. Often people moving into one of these parks may be in a position where they cannot find another type of rental property. Similarly, people who are arranging a funeral for a loved one are in a very vulnerable position. So I am pleased to commend this bill to the house, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (11:24): I am pleased to follow on directly from the member for Footscray, quite surprisingly. It is never easy to follow on from the member for Footscray and the fine contributions that she makes to the house. I am pleased – as others have been – to have the opportunity to contribute to the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. I note that those opposite are not opposing the bill. The comments from the lead speaker I think relate to what are sensible, fair and practical changes that are contained within the legislation before the house this morning.

This government is focused on making sure that it is supporting all Victorians at all stages of their lives. We are ensuring that we are providing a range of opportunities and options for those who change life circumstances, who age, who wish to make changes for many and varied reasons within their lives. The residential park changes that are before the house go to providing additional certainty, surety and in many ways opportunities for a better, fairer system. We know that residential parks provide options for a different way of living, and it is important that we ensure that those opportunities and options are provided and maintained. But as a state, as we grow and expand and people take different opportunities to live in different ways, we need to make sure that we are providing for more and better options as people are making those changes.

Reflecting on some conversations within my local community – certainly I have great engagement with a number of our citizens groups, particularly the Sunbury senior citizens who I caught up with just recently, and a shout-out to Frank and Louise Zambello, who do an amazing job, and to all the senior citizens right across the electorate – they are particularly conversations that relate to a change of life, to a change of employment and to a change in family circumstances. Making sure that we have a robust but also dynamic system that achieves that balance, or equilibrium if you like, around choice

and certainty is something that has been spoken about with me by the senior citizens but also right across the community. What I think we should keep working hard on with the changes to the residential parks and how they are regulated, which is one element that is contained in this piece of legislation, is making sure we are supporting our local communities. We know, and the member for Footscray touched on this, that residential parks are commonly marketed as lower cost or alternative accommodation for senior Victorians. Residents living in residential parks will typically own a moveable dwelling and rent the underlying site where the dwelling is located from the site owner.

The Residential Tenancies Act 1997 regulates a range of residential tenure types, including residential rights of people living in residential parks, which are also referred to as part 4A parks, manufactured home villages and lifestyle communities. In March 2021 the government implemented more than 130 reforms to make renting fairer and safer for all Victorians, and that includes residents living in part 4A parks. Those reforms included a new requirement for precontractual disclosure of certain information such as the disclosure of the nature of the park's operator, the operator's interest in the land, the residential park rules and the amenities available for use. Not to pre-empt what the future debate will be, but I think there is a recognition across the chamber that these are, as I mentioned earlier, sensible and practical reforms that go to what is an important part of options and opportunities for people's living, their way of life.

I wish to now move to the changes around the provisions for funerals. Certainly, as has been highlighted and spoken to in previous contributions, the process families go through for a funeral when a loved one is lost is a particularly tough, emotional and challenging period. That is so for anyone, their family and the wider community. What the government is seeking to do this morning by the passage of what is before us is to make sure that greater transparency exists, bringing us into line with other jurisdictions and ensuring that we know that greater transparency and fairness are provided. What that does is give greater confidence to families and those who are grieving in what is a particularly tough, challenging and emotional time.

We know and understand that the vast majority of people across our state do the right thing. Particularly when it comes to these very emotional times, we know that there are so many people who will always put people first and support communities, as ought to be the case. However, as with any process, piece of legislation or matter that becomes of financial interest, there are some who seek to do the wrong thing. It is our responsibility and obligation as a government and indeed as a Parliament to ensure that that does not occur and that further damage, whether that be emotional or financial, does not exacerbate what is already a really tough, challenging and emotional period for families. What this legislation does is ensure that that transparency is improved, and that is a very, very important matter.

Both of these changes, albeit relatively small, are important. They form what is, in my view, a range of matters that have come before the house and will continue to come before the house today and tomorrow to ensure that we are doing everything that we can to improve those opportunities that people seek to better support their families as their life circumstances change. The residential parks changes mean there will be more opportunities, there will be more options and there will be better support. That is important, as are the changes to the funeral arrangements.

What I know and understand is that members on this side of the house, as we move through our local communities, are constantly listening to and working with local communities. Whether it is by knocking on doors, making phone calls or being out and about at community events, we are ensuring that, as life circumstances change and as society and community evolve and change, the house is responsive, the team is responsive and the government is responsive in making sure that we are listening, we are acting and we are delivering to make sure that Victoria becomes an even better, stronger, fairer and more decent state. That is the primary role of our team, and we will continue to focus on that as we move forward. I commend the bill to the house.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (11:34): I rise on the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. I thank the member for Sunbury for jumping up; I was just farewelling the Consul General

of Japan, who will be heading back home. What an amazing Consul General he has been. From a bipartisan point of view, it has been magnificent. I know this is not on the bill, but that Consul General has done a lot to develop relationships with many in this house which will build for all of us going forward, so everyone in this place thanks him from the bottom of our hearts. The other good thing was I said I would pay for all the coffee but I have just left the room, so someone else can fix that up. So some very good things have come out of this bill already.

One aspect of this bill that is very important, particularly out in the growth corridors, is the amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and talking about caravan parks and people who are going into lifestyle villages. Traditionally – it was not that long ago – we only really ever heard of retirement homes as places for people to go to towards the end of their life, when they needed extra support et cetera, to have assistance, whether it was medical or social. What we have seen over time is now this development of these lifestyle villages. Obviously we have all visited many of them. I went to one recently that my father-in-law has just moved into. The quality of these facilities now is second to none, I think. The improvements have been magnificent. The good news is they have changed the age requirement at this one and it is now over 50, so I am only 18 months away. I walked in there and thought to myself at first about how people used to always be fearful of going into any village towards that stage in life, because it was an admission of retirement, an admission of where you were heading, whereas now they are actually creating these lifestyle villages. I think it is really important that parliaments and governments keep up with this change.

That is why in this bill there are many parts that we think are heading in the right direction. It is ensuring that we have fairness and openness around rent increases, that we have standardisation across the country and that people going into these residences do not fall into the traps of yesteryear. We know this still happens on occasion, where people who are more vulnerable do get into a position where they are just looking for somewhere to live and end up signing documents that put them in a position that is financially unsustainable. I think it is really important from the whole Parliament's perspective as this changes – and I know that the member for Ovens Valley said there are 10,000 currently within these facilities across the state and another 12,000 to come over the next five years – that we are changing the rules and the legislation to protect those people going into these villages and to these sites. The last thing that we want to see is what we have seen in the past with some of the organisations that have retirement villages where the funding model effectively takes everything that a person has on the way in. Those that are the most vulnerable are not putting that money aside to fund the next generation; they just want it there to get by. Or they are in circumstances, as we see, where an over-55s or lifestyle village is no longer appropriate given their health outcomes. They need to be able to get that money back out to go into a facility that is suitable, where they can get that extra support. That is why when we are looking at this and at the change – how it is more transparent – we think it is really, really important.

I know the other part of this is around the Funerals Act 2006 and ensuring that prices are available so people can see openly and honestly what is happening. I think the funeral services and the funeral sector over time on occasions have had a negative name in the community, because you are catching people in a position that it is very difficult. I am going to say you are not in a position to negotiate. You generally go into a funeral service at the last minute. You are going in and speaking to someone. You have just lost a partner, parent, friend – whatever it is in those circumstances. You do not feel you are in a position to negotiate. You just think, 'I'm going to walk in here. This is a place that is going to take care of me.' We have heard of circumstances in the past where people have been effectively ripped off in that position. It is pretty sad, but the reality is that is what legislation is there for – it is to protect those that are not in a position to have that at the time. So having an open price policy is very important.

Unfortunately for me, we have just lost a friend to cancer. I spoke to her husband – he just went through this process – and he said he could not believe how hard it was to find out things as simple as 'What is the price of a funeral? How much is it going to cost me right now?' He is in a circumstance where

money was not the biggest issue, but after discussions with his wife, who had a long illness, she effectively just said, 'Do not waste any money on a funeral. Just do everything on the cheap, whatever you can. People will come along who love me. To be honest, if you save a thousand bucks, put it on the bar and have a drink.' That was the preference, and that is many people's preference. I think it is really important when people are in those positions, in those circumstances, that they can have that open and transparent market. Again, it is a market that is very short term. Many of us in this room would have bought a car at some stage. You can go onto Google. I can look up a Hyundai. I can then go and compare five different Hyundai dealers. I can work out who is going to do me the best deal. Then at the end someone throws me a free tank of fuel, and that is the one I am going to go with. That does not happen with funerals, because you are generally in a different circumstance.

One thing we learned from this – I was not even aware of this until I heard from him – was that basically the hospital said to him straight after she passed, 'Which funeral company are you going with?' He did not want to think about that at that time. In that circumstance, if you say 'with X' – and let us be honest, in my mind if I was doing it, I would go 'Tobin Brothers', because I know Tobin Brothers in Berwick are massive, so it would be the first name that came to my head – that might not be the best outcome for financial reasons. I think if you had that openness on there, in today's world – you do not want to be doing it, but you have to – you could get on your phone and go, 'I just want to check a few things in here.' Having the price of a coffin on a website – again, probably in here we do not want to discuss it, but it is just a reality – and I think making sure that we have got that transparency in areas like that is really, really important. We have all been through it, and we have all seen it.

I will go back to the Residential Tenancies Act. We know that in Victoria we have got issues in relation to housing availability. I know through the growth corridors rent is a massive issue, including the cost of rent. The amount and rate that rent has gone up in the last probably two or three years has been horrendous through some of those areas. I do not want to get super political on this part, but we know and understand some of the implications of tax and how housing is working with that. I think the opportunity with this bill is to ensure that we have got confidence and stability in the market. To have those looking at investing – not the people moving into them, but large-scale investors – to build these types of lifestyle villages as an opportunity going forward is nothing short of a positive, because then people have an opportunity to downsize their home. They can move into something like this, which gives them safety and security. A lot of people get to the stage in life where they want to travel, and they know that their house is going to be protected. Every person that moves into one of these generally frees up another family home in the community.

If we can get houses back on the market in these areas for families and young families, that is a positive within the market. It gives people an opportunity to buy a house for themselves or an opportunity for other people to look at an investment they can rent out to others in the community. We have seen it through the growth corridors, where people are struggling to get rental properties. When you see a rental property come on the market, we are talking about 50 people turning up to put their name down to try and rent a property through Berwick or Officer or Pakenham. These are places that probably five years ago would have had around a 4 or 5 per cent vacancy rate at minimum; now it is down to a 0.8 or 0.9 per cent vacancy rate. There are less houses on the market for investment properties. A big issue down there at the moment with many of those properties is that for every three investment properties that go on the market to be sold, only one of them is coming back as an investment property, so we need to be ensuring we free up that housing market. Giving the older generation, who are looking at options and alternatives moving forward, the stability and confidence that they can go into what we are calling caravan parks here but are lifestyle villages will give us the opportunity to free up some of those houses for the next generation to come in and buy some of those properties.

I know we have got the member for Cranbourne in here. We have seen the growth down there, and we are going to continue to see it. I know the member for Bass was here before. My electorate has got 60,000 voters in it now, so the growth is massive out through those areas. Clyde and Clyde North have 10-plus families a day moving in. If we do not have not just new homes but some of these older homes

on the market and if we continue to build houses on 600- to 700-square-metre blocks, we are going to take up a lot of land very, very quickly. These lifestyle villages are a genuine opportunity for that generation, who want to free up some cash, have the opportunity to travel, invest in other things they want to do in their future and spend some quality time with their children and grandchildren. These are great opportunities for them to have the facilities – the pool, the gymnasium et cetera – without having to put them all inside their home and a great opportunity to free up cash.

As I said, we are not opposing this bill. We will wait to see the regulations come through, but we do support the concept of having that open, transparent position for the whole of the state that is equivalent across the country, so people moving in have the open, transparent transactions that they deserve for the future.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (11:44): I rise to make my contribution to the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. I am not really sure if I can say much more that has not already been said by the previous four speakers. I am grateful that the member for Ovens Valley is not opposing this bill, and again I appreciate the thoughts and words that every other member has already made in regard to this bill. The bill will make amendments to part 4A of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, and these changes will bolster consumer protections for residents of residential parks. This is done through requiring part 4A site agreements to be in a prescribed standard form with proper precontractual disclosure to ensure that consumers fully understand all requirements, stating that rent may be increased and providing the formula for how they calculate the rent increase. I have a lot of residential parks in my electorate, and I have had quite a few people coming into my office to talk about their concerns with how the rent is calculated, how the residential village works and contracts. But I will talk about that a little bit later on.

Additionally, this bill is seeking to amend the Funerals Act 2006. When I read what changes are being made I was shocked that they were not already actually in place. The changes being made will require funeral providers to display the prices for their services and coffins and list them online and in a prominent position at the business premise. I have had the unfortunate experience of having to bury my brother and my father, and when reading this bill I think back on those experiences and I cannot remember anything. The fact that my brother committed suicide added an element of difficulty. It was something that I had to come to terms with, and not only me – my mother was with me in my house in New South Wales. I had to break the news to her, and then I had to take her home to deal with this.

I cannot remember what I did, but I must have organised the funeral over the phone as well as flights for my family and things. It was an incredibly stressful time. It was an incredibly painful time. The plane trip from Sydney to Perth was one of the longest plane flights I have ever been on, and I have flown around the world. Getting there, I remember the funeral directors were fantastic. In fact where we had the funeral, I used to go to school with a kid called Ainsley, and his father was the caretaker of Fremantle Cemetery. Ainsley used to have parties there at night, and they would slide down the crematory slide sometimes. We did not do it this time. My brother would have loved that. He did slide down but unfortunately not in the condition we really wanted him to. I do not remember any of the details, so I understand that we need this transparency and for these details to be pretty well spelt out to us.

I digress to say that I had to take my sick dog to the vet. It was a veterinary hospital. Every time they looked at my dog they would come out and say she has got this or that and it is going to be another \$4000 or they would go back and come out and say, 'We need to put a drip in, and that will be \$430.' I found it sort of amusing that there was this running commentary, and I was able to take my dog to another vet that was cheaper. But you are not going to do that when you are trying to organise your brother's funeral or your father's funeral. I certainly think being able to clearly understand what the costs are going to be and clearly understand what service is to be provided will help a lot, because quite frankly after going into a funeral home I do not think you are going to turn around and go out and go to another one, so I fully endorse what this bill is trying to achieve.

I might also add that within this bill there is an added penalty for noncompliance, and it enables regulations to prescribe forms and particulars for the goods and services and the coffin price list. Again, this is not to punish funeral providers but to give consumers another level of transparency so that they can make the best decisions for themselves. Consumer advocates like CHOICE have raised concerns about funeral pricing for a long time, citing the need for increased price transparency and the lack of it within the funeral industry. Again, this bill I think is going to be fantastic.

One of the big surprises for me when I went back to collect my brother's ashes was how expensive that was. Again, I had no idea. I might just add that we scattered my brother's ashes down at the port in Fremantle, at the dog beach where he used to love to go. When we went down there as a family, no-one was there, and when we scattered his ashes a whole lot of dogs appeared and played along the beach. It was a beautiful moment. I am a bit teary today.

I would like to talk about the Residential Tenancies Act. In this bill we are making changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, which I note has been a bit of an ongoing topic over the last few years in the media. The residential park sector has witnessed significant growth, and with growth comes increased concerns about certain aspects of residential park operations; namely, issues around precontractual disclosure, park site agreements not being standardised across the industry and a lack of consumer protections.

My experience with residential parks was as a councillor for the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council. There was a residential park proposed to go into where I live, in Tyabb. I was always a bit confused by the planning of it, because where they wanted to put the park was low-density housing. They were 5-acre blocks and they could only put one house on them, but for some reason with the planning scheme they were able to put 50 houses on each 5-acre block, which kind of staggered me. I know we need housing. I just thought, 'If it's low density, it's low density,' but apparently not.

The idea with these parks, and part of the planning, is that the buildings can be removed within a day. I have been through some of these parks, and they are really lovely, but I really do not know how you could take a building out in one day. As I said, a lot of people have come to me who have bought into these parks; they have bought into that lifestyle. I think the process of going to the parks and meeting with the operators of the parks can be really enjoyable. You will have a coffee and maybe a white wine or something. They will take you around and show you the facilities – the bowling greens – and talk about how you can have picnics and families and friends over. I think to some extent the true, deep contractual arrangements may not be as transparent as one would like them to be. As one gentleman said when he came to me, he liked the dream but they were just bleeding him dry.

You buy a house – and there are people saying that the houses are cheaper than perhaps they might normally be; I am not quite sure if that is true or not – and you rent the land underneath, but you also pay fees for upkeep and other things in the park. Of course when you sell you have to pay a certain percentage of the sale price of your house to the company. I did have a couple of people come to me saying, 'I can't afford to live here, but I can't afford to leave.' I think at that stage in life, when you just wish to retire and enjoy the time ahead and the time left, you do not want to be fearful of the fact that you cannot live the way you want to and in fact may end up with nothing. I do not think that is great, and obviously this bill is working on that.

I also understand that there is some other research. The Minister for Consumer Affairs announced that a research review will be undertaken by the commissioner for residential tenancies alongside the Consumer Policy Research Centre. This will review Victoria's residential park sector. It will engage with residents of these parks through a survey to gain further understanding of this rapidly growing industry and what changes can be made to improve the lifestyle. I think that is incredibly welcome, and I am looking forward to that happening, as I am sure a lot of people in these parks are.

I think I have said what I came here to say. I am really glad that this bill is before the house today. I am glad that it looks like everyone will be accepting of the bill, and I am very, very happy to recommend this bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (11:54): I too rise to talk about the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. In doing so, like the previous member, I thank the member for Ovens Valley for speaking especially about the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and how it impacts people that live in border towns. To have some clarity come in to regulate the industry a little bit more is a really good thing. I know that in my patch we have a lot of lifestyle living now and old caravan parks have been turned into residential parks. It is a choice that our older generation are making. It actually gives them a little bit of security in being able to own a dwelling; of course the land underneath they still rent. They will have some certainty about the rules and regulations, because if you sit down and read these contracts, they are a little bit hard to digest. If you are not in that industry but in that situation and you want a dwelling or a house and you sign on the dotted line, there are rules and regulations around it. Some are good rules and some are hidden rules, which do spring up at times.

I do note, as the member for Ovens Valley said, we will not oppose this bill, because what we are trying to achieve here is really good. The intention is to change site agreements between residents and site owners to standardise these forms and ensure key information is displayed before an agreement is entered into. As I said before, these are mostly elderly people that are moving out of the properties they have had in town and choosing a new lifestyle. As the member for Hastings said before, they are moving into these lifestyle areas, where there are bowling greens and there are cinemas and theatres that have been built to give a sense of security and community. People may have lost a loved one and be moving as a single person into these environments. This allows them to have companionship and interaction with other people and, as he eloquently put it, to live out the rest of their life in these areas. But we need to make sure that they know what they are signing up for and also, moving on, if something does happen and loved ones pass away, that the generation that is left knows what happens in that next step. If you are trying to sell the property, how will all that run? It is a grey area, and hopefully clearing some of these items up will make it a lot easier.

I used to work in a lot of these places in my role as a plumber. I was able to sit down and talk to people in these lifestyle villages. They really love being there, but things happen. If there are upgrades of infrastructure in the park, whether they be power, gas or water upgrades, hidden in the detail is that they are up for paying some of these fees as a collective. That was always a concern, because some of the people living there have budgeted to a very tight schedule. The hidden costs are the ones that cause all the grief.

There is also the funeral part of this amendment bill. As the member for Hastings said, people really do not look into what happens at the end of life. They sort of push that into the background. So they need to have some clarity about pricing when they have to sit down with the funeral people. If you are planning a funeral for a loved one, you are really not switched on as to what is going on most of the time, because of the grief of losing that loved one. Price really does not seem to matter. It is a very tight window when you are trying to make sure that the send-off for that loved one is done in the right way. We need set prices – standard prices – that everybody knows, so if you choose to upgrade, as such, you know exactly what the bottom line is and where you are starting. That is also a good thing to do.

Down in the Latrobe Valley we have the Gippsland Memorial Park. That is a huge cemetery trust down there. It is not only used for the Latrobe Valley, but a lot of other people come and use the cemetery park to bury their loved ones. There is a crematorium in there as well which they can use. It is a big business, and they do it well. I know back in the day you heard some horror stories about what the end price was from people that went through losing a loved one and getting the bill in the mail, so to speak. They do it much better now.

Latrobe Valley Funeral Services and Dave Hastie down in Gippsland run a fantastic business. It is hard to say ‘fantastic business’ when you are talking about death, but they engage the family all the time. Some of the send-offs that they do have moved from being in a church or in a place at the cemetery, and they have funerals on beaches or they have them in paddocks, and it is great that they can actually do all that. But to actually have that written down so that you can make a conscious decision about how much this is going to cost and where it is going to be when you are at your most vulnerable after losing a loved one is something that is really good to do. This bill is providing these opportunities, and as I said before, it is great that on both sides of the chamber we are in agreement on this.

One story I do have is from working as a plumber at the Gippsland Memorial Park. I am one – probably the only – person who has actually been put into the chamber at the crematorium and been pulled back out and is still able to stand here. I say that because in my role as a plumber I had to be pushed in there to change the gas injectors. They lay you on the trolley – so I am lying on my back – and then they push you in. It is hot and a very tight space, and you flip over and do the work that you need to do. I must say that I made sure that the gas was disconnected and the power was disconnected, because some of the people that work at these funeral places are great people but have a wicked sense of humour. They did put the door down on me and knocked on the window and waved, but I did end up doing the job and coming out.

The next thing that followed was they said, ‘This is great. You’ve done that, but look around.’ There probably would have been, I do not know, 15 or 20 coffins that had been through services and needed to be put into the chamber. So they said, ‘We need you to stay here and make sure that it is burning properly.’ So we had to test all the jets and the pressures to make sure they were right. They rolled the coffin in, and there is a little window where you can actually view it. I watched, it started and that was enough for me; I did not want to see what came next. I am very thankful that I am here. I am sure that the injectors have been changed again, but I still will claim that I am one of the few people who have been in and come out. Whether it is a precursor to what happens down the track I am unsure, whether it be like our member for Euroa, accosted by a wombat, with her life flashing before her eyes – and I will not go as far as the member for Gippsland East. We do not oppose this bill.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (12:04): I too rise to support the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024, and of course I do so in the spirit of Labor long believing that Victorian consumers deserve greater transparency and greater protections in order to make informed choices. That is why as a government we have continued to progress meaningful reforms that support consumer choice and transparency and that also help with the cost of living, because in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis challenging many households, strengthening consumer supports and rights is paramount for this Victorian Labor government. That is of course why we are here today. The bill is focused on enhancing the transparency of information provided to Victorians so that they can make informed and better consumer choices when it comes to the residential parks housing sector and also the funeral industry. I will be focusing the substance of my contribution on the funeral industry, funeral homes and the end-of-life industry.

The death of a friend or family member can be a time of considerable sadness, distress and reflection. For those arranging a funeral these circumstances can impact their usual decision-making abilities, and funeral providers have important roles in guiding consumers through this very delicate and sensitive process. Whilst the funeral industry is certainly one of the most sombre of industries by nature, the funeral industry is also very much big business, which is why improving consumer choice and transparency is so important. With most Australians having to organise, dare we say, at least one funeral in their lifetime, the industry’s revenue according to the ACCC has been previously identified at \$1.6 billion. Two publicly listed corporations account for almost a third of the industry, with 26 per cent being InvoCare, which includes White Lady Funerals, Simplicity Funerals and Value Cremations, and 6 per cent forming part of the Propel Group, which is traditionally focused I understand on regional

areas. Around 68 per cent of funeral businesses are typically smaller and family-run businesses, and I do have quite a few in my electorate too.

The cost of a funeral service can vary significantly depending on the products and services included, whether it is the ceremony's location or the service that is marketed. According to the ACCC, costs on average for funerals can range anywhere from \$4000 or thereabouts for a simple, no-cremation service, right through to in excess of \$20,000 for a full service and burial. Businesses within the funeral industry, like other service providers, are subject to a range of legal obligations, including relevant federal competition and consumer laws, and the funeral services sector is also subject to a range of industry-specific regulations within each state and territory that are in part enforced by that respective jurisdiction. Victoria, for example, did require the registration – and still does – of businesses that provide funeral services but, prior to some of these reforms, not the individual funeral directors.

Funeral pricing has been the subject of significant nationwide scrutiny over several years. CHOICE has previously reported on issues within the funeral industry, including uncertain pricing, misinformation, fees for no service and a highly concentrated market where the ownership of funeral provider businesses is unclear. In 2021 the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, ACCC, released a report on funeral services sector competition and consumer issues. The report highlighted common sector issues across the country, including pricing structures lacking clarity and transparency, which may mislead consumers, and the bundling of goods and services, which can limit consumer choice and access.

Consumers are typically grieving when looking to purchase a funeral and may find it difficult to consider items and prices fully or be vulnerable to being overcharged before making decisions. We have heard some of those stories as part of the debate today. This bill brings Victoria into line with other jurisdictions like New South Wales and Queensland to increase that transparency for funeral home pricing. For example, it proposes to amend the Funerals Act 2006 to require funeral homes to display a price list for all goods and services on their online business website and in prominent positions at their business premises. Funeral providers, for example, will also be required to publish and display a coffin price list in the same place. A failure to comply with these and other requirements will be considered an offence.

Along with every household in my electorate at some stage being consumers of the funeral industry, it is my community that has had – as well as the member for Broadmeadows' and the member for Preston's – a longstanding connection to the state's funeral and crematoria sector. My community is home to or on the border of the Coburg cemetery, John Fawkner cemetery and the Northern Memorial Park. Each of these and around 21 other cemeteries across the north are overseen, managed and maintained by the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust. I commend the work of the trust, including the chair Michael Doery, deputy chair Liz Beattie, trustee Katerina Angelopoulos and all of the trustees, executive management and hardworking staff who work so respectfully and diligently with families on a daily basis to farewell loved ones and lay them to rest in our community.

Established in 1856, with a 14.5-acre site gazetted a year later, the Coburg cemetery was created, and its first recorded burial was 19-year-old Margaret Sullivan in 1875. During the Spanish flu pandemic, schools were closed and the cemetery was open on Sundays to cope with demand. It reached its capacity in 1971. Coburg has just under 60,000 people buried across its 25 acres as of 7 August this year. Some key people buried at Coburg include William Guthrie Spence, an ALP politician and founder of the AWU; Dick Lee, a Collingwood footballer; James Francis 'Jock' McHale, a Collingwood footballer and coach; Charles Web Gilbert, a sculptor; Anna Teresa Brennan, the first woman to graduate in law at the University of Melbourne and the second to be admitted to the Victorian Bar; Albert Sylvester Renny, a jockey who died after a fall at the Fitzroy racecourse; and Sir Alexander George Wales, a former Lord Mayor of Melbourne.

Fawkner cemetery was established in 1906 and designed by Charles Heath. He also designed Coburg town hall. It was the first cemetery in Australia to introduce a grand public mausoleum. It contains the

war graves of around 173 Commonwealth service personnel from World War I and World War II. Fawkner spans a huge 113 hectares and a further 282 acres across its northern part. As of August this year, it has received 220,000-plus burials, not including interments of cremated remains.

Some key people buried at Fawkner include Dorothy Knapp, the first person to be interred at Fawkner cemetery, aged four; Thomas 'Frank' Francis Traynor, a jazz musician and jazz club proprietor; Revel Cooper, a Noongar artist; Kathleen Best, the founding director of the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps; Edward Phillip Harrington, a World War I soldier and war poet; John Coleman, Essendon VFL player and coach; Deirdre Cash, author of *The Delinquents* under the pen name Criena Rohan; Alfred Tipper, showman, cyclist and artist; and of course Mark 'Chopper' Read. How many jobs are associated, you ask. 264 employees work across the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust, so there are a lot of jobs associated with the end-of-life and funeral industry in my community.

I would like to take this opportunity, if I may, given the nature of this bill, to pay a special dedicated tribute to a local community citizen and veteran who recently passed away and whose funeral is coming up on 6 September at the Coburg RSL. Godfrey Camenzuli was a dedicated, passionate and compassionate advocate for our community and country. Godfrey was 81 years old at his passing. He was born on 24 February 1943. He passed, after a prolonged illness and battle, on 24 August 2024. Godfrey was the immediate past president of the Coburg RSL, serving as president from 2013 to 2017. He served in the Australian Army and was a staff sergeant in the Royal Australian Armoured Corps, serving with the 4/19th Prince of Wales Light Horse brigade as well as the Australian Red Cross. He joined the Citizen Military Forces in 1960 and was discharged in 1984, with a bit of time off in between. He also trained in the armoured corps soldiers for Vietnam.

Godfrey was an RSL national life member and a stalwart and saviour of the Coburg RSL when it was going through very tough times quite a few years ago. He was part of the RSL for nearly 25 years, and he held numerous positions on the committee, including as president, vice-president and former past president. He was granted life RSL membership in 2013. He was also awarded the Humanitarian Overseas Service Medal, the Reserve Force Medal, the Defence Long Service Medal and the Red Cross Meritorious Service Award. He was the person who welcomed everyone to the Coburg RSL. He was a feature of the RSL and would love to share a yarn and a drink with every single patron or member there. We still have our branch meetings there as the Pascoe Vale Labor branch, and he was always there, happy to have a chat and have his say. He was truly a mate of Coburg. That is the best way to describe him. He will be missed.

I express our community's deep sorrow and condolences to the Coburg RSL and RSL Victoria, but of course I express my deepest sympathies to Godfrey's family, loved ones and friends, including his daughter Paula Camenzuli and his partner Kerri Marshall. Godfrey's funeral service, as I said, will be taking place at the Coburg RSL on 6 September at 2 pm. It was his final wish that his funeral be held on a Friday afternoon so everyone could knock off work, celebrate his life and go home early. That was the sort of bloke that he was. Michael Pianta, the president of the Coburg RSL, has asked me to convey the following message:

Rest in peace, our brother in arms ... your service is completed.

Lest we forget. On that note, I truly do commend this bill to the house. We all will have something to do with the funeral sector at some stage in our lives. For those left behind, let it be a fair process.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (12:14): Today I rise to make a contribution on the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. The bill is for an act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 in relation to part 4A parks and to amend the Funerals Act 2006 in relation to funeral goods and services price lists, coffin price lists – providing more transparency – and for other purposes. I acknowledge the many contributions in the house today, particularly that of the member for Morwell, who finished on an interesting note by sharing his own funeral parlour experiences in his former plumbing role, which was quite interesting. Many of the members in the chamber have contributed some interesting experiences.

The bill includes reforms that ensure that Victorians have the appropriate information when making critical decisions about their housing arrangements and when making funeral arrangements following the passing of a loved one. Under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 residential parks are regulated under part 4A of the act and are commonly marketed as a lower cost or alternative accommodation option. Most of the time people living in residential parks move into a small house or unit and they then rent the land from the owner, who are often land lease companies. With the existing pressures on the Victorian housing market, limited housing availability and affordability and substantial increases in rent, more and more Victorians are seeking alternatives and are turning to the more affordable option of residential parks and other options.

During the current housing crisis there has been a substantial growth in the land lease industry, which is expected to double in the next five years. This pressure presents new risks, as the market is not well regulated and there are few protections for residents who lease land. I note this bill will amend part 4A of the Residential Tenancies Act to require a site agreement to be in a prescribed standard form, prescribe specific methods for calculating rent increases and strengthen precontract disclosure requirements. It is hoped that these reforms will improve clarity and transparency for consumers entering residential park contracts, provide better support for residents to make informed choices and respond to concerns raised by residents and their advocates, as well as strengthen consumer protections and clarify rights and obligations.

It is critical that we move towards better processes to access housing and to ensure that protections and guidelines are in place and that there are no surprises. When disputes present themselves it can be very stressful for both parties. Vulnerable tenants can be extremely disadvantaged when they do not have the resources, knowledge and, often, financial capacity to defend themselves. Lifestyle villages have become increasingly popular for retirees or those wanting to downsize. I have heard there have been some issues and disputes within those residences, so hopefully this bill will address residents' issues and have a clearer process in place. As pointed out previously, people are having to look for more affordable housing alternatives, so it is no surprise that this bill is before the house and there is a need for reform.

Caravan parks are also becoming popular for both short-term and long-term occupancy. Regional Victoria has lots of visitors and tourists, and caravan parks play a significant role in filling some of the accommodation needs. There is need to have better conditions and transparency and confidence and stability in the market. During this housing crisis is a good time to – and we should – do more and make it easier for someone to downsize, as this creates more available housing in the market.

The increased land tax has had a significant detrimental impact on the housing market and has led to increased rent and less rental properties and landlords selling up as they cannot bear the financial impact. The state budget has failed to address housing, and with rising cost-of-living pressures, it is any wonder that residential park tenancy is becoming a more affordable option.

We are going backwards fast in my electorate when it comes to housing, and those reaching out for housing support have significantly increased. We actually have one of the highest rates of homelessness in the state. This government is not meeting its housing targets, and the numbers of homeless people will continue to increase.

My electorate has many residential parks that people call home. In recent months my office has been providing assistance to many residents from these residential parks who are eligible for the 2023–24 energy bill relief program for eligible embedded network households. It has been really interesting and great to actually hear of their experiences living in residential parks, but some of their demands and needs are not being met.

While Queensland and Western Australian residents have been receiving the first quarter grants of the 2024–25 Commonwealth government electricity rebates since 1 July this year, which will total \$300 per household over the full year, Victorians continue to wait. So on the one hand we talk about

improvement and support, and on the other hand, when there is financial incentive, Victorians are forced to wait, when they need assistance right now. The financial distress that many Victorians are facing is unacceptable, and it is due to this government's financial mismanagement. Regional Victoria is a beautiful place to live, and our residential park tenants are proud of their homes. They have a sense of belonging and a place to call home, they are part of a residential community, but like with many Victorians, I hear time and time again of their financial struggles.

Another act the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024 amends is the Funerals Act 2006, which aims to strengthen transparency with funeral providers. In particular the bill inserts a new section into the act, section 23A, which provides for the display of funeral goods and services price lists and coffin price lists on their internet sites and at business premises. A funeral provider must display the provider's funeral goods and services prices and coffin prices either on the provider's website or in a prominent position at the provider's business premises. Failure to do so will result in 60 penalty units, which in today's terms is close to \$11,000.

Victorians should be supported when making a decision when they are grieving a loved one and are at their most vulnerable. It is important that there are protections and penalties in place for those who seek to break the law or fail to comply with our laws, and we must ensure best practice. The cost of a funeral can be stressful for a family, and having clear access to costs online will alleviate the pressures of making decisions when you front up at a funeral parlour with no idea of what the costs will be. Many of us have been through this experience, and it is confronting, as family members are bereaved and not in a good state of mind. Most operators are doing the right thing and are genuine and care for the people that they support. It is difficult having to make financial decisions at that time. The funeral industry are supportive of these changes.

Like many of us in this place, we have gone through this experience. I can recall how hard it was for my family when we lost my dad due to quite tragic circumstances. It was a shock, and when you are dealing with such an incredibly sad time and all of the family members are grieving in their own way, it is hard to try and work through the funeral arrangements and make sensible decisions or decisions that are appropriate to all. I think, when I look back to that time and also when my mum passed away, it would have been so much more helpful to have had access to some of the costs prior to visiting the funeral parlour.

In my electorate recently it was revealed that prices at the Shepparton Public Cemetery will be increasing significantly, and this will have a severe impact on families in our community, particularly those already facing financial hardship. For example, burying a child in the Shepparton Public Cemetery now costs \$3391, up from \$565. That is a 500 per cent increase. In addition, Muslim burials have increased from \$1450 to \$3779, a 160 per cent increase. As you can imagine, exorbitant fees have been a shock and are unfair, placing undue additional financial stress on grieving families. The cost of a funeral is already extremely high; many families are already struggling with the rising cost of living, and these increased burial costs are unacceptable. It is unacceptable that these changes were implemented without any consultation or consideration.

Losing a loved one is an incredibly difficult time for any family. We should be looking at ways to support and assist families, not adding extra financial burdens at a time when they can least afford it. It is actually astonishing to think that this government would stoop this low by increasing burial fees – yet another financial impact on Victorians when they can least afford it. Finally, we do not oppose this bill. Hopefully the changes in this bill will make for a better and fairer system.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (12:22): I am very pleased to rise to speak on this bill. We note that part of the impetus for these changes is that there is a growth in the land lease industry but there are not sufficient protections in place to meet the growing needs of this important sector. Of course we know that some of the drivers are existing housing pressures in Victoria. These are not exclusive to Victoria; they are nationwide and certainly occur in various parts of the world. But I will just make one point: you cannot on the one hand sledge Victoria with regard to the availability of housing and

on the other hand oppose our social and affordable housing developments. The two do not go together, so if you are going to sledge, you need to be able to match it.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, just put it out there. But anyway, coming back to the bill, I believe and my understanding is that we do have bipartisan support on the bill. I am very relieved about that, noting that the incentive or what is driving people towards also the residential parks and alternative accommodation options is that they are being marketed as low-cost options and potentially viable alternatives. I am not saying there is anything wrong with that per se, provided there is transparency for the consumer, hence the bill that we are debating here today.

Let us face it, when you make a decision, whenever you move in this particular context – you are going to take out a contract to move into a residential park – that is a really big decision, particularly, I should say, for senior Victorians. They are not necessarily at the start of their career in life, so their financial capacity is likely to be more constrained. Hence it is even more important that there are adequate protections in place so they know what they are getting into – so that everyone who is making a decision to, for instance, get into a residential park can pull out the calculator and be able to accurately say, ‘I know exactly how much this is going to cost me, and I know if I can afford it or not.’

But there is a further limb to this. There is also the element of being able to understand their obligations, including the financial costs involved not only in living in or exiting a residential park but also how rent increases will be calculated, bond arrangements and additional costs and fees. You can see how someone could, if they were not fully informed, very quickly get into trouble, or perhaps they change their mind. Perhaps they get in there and go ‘Actually, this isn’t for me’ but realise they are restricted in their capacity to get out of that situation because of fees et cetera that they had not anticipated at the time of making the big decision to take out a contract with that particular proprietor for potentially the rest of their life. This is why it is a really good step forward, this bill, noting this is not the end of the conversation on this issue. I am very happy to see, because of the growing market, the Minister for Consumer Affairs has commissioned the commissioner for residential tenancies to partner with the Consumer Policy Research Centre to review Victoria’s residential parks sector to understand concerns and opportunities to strengthen consumer protection. You can see that we are really diving in a very deep and profound way into this issue because it matters, and we want to make sure that all Victorians who are going to literally invest in these particular living circumstances are adequately protected.

Having said that, we were not going to wait for the outcomes of that particular review, noting that there is still more to do in this space, but at the same time we want to make sure that no stone is left unturned with regard to doing everything we can to give Victorians the information they need and deserve. It is only fair, and fairness is certainly what our Allan Labor government is all about. We have also heard stakeholder concerns; that goes without saying. But this is why we were not waiting, because we know there is an imperative to move these reforms along, hence that is why the important regulatory controls are being brought about with this legislation.

The kinds of things that the legislation will amend require that all residential park site agreements are in a prescribed form as determined in regulations. This will mean that consumers can more easily understand agreements and are able to compare and contrast different agreements to get the best outcome for that situation. That is really practical and sensible reform. Secondly, it is to expand the types of information. I have to say when you read it you think this should go without saying, but in any case it is great that we can have that properly legislated. For instance, things like the name and contact details of the site owner would appear to be a fundamental – the site owner’s representative at the park, prescribed entitlements, financial matters and obligations for when someone enters into or leaves a residential park, including but not limited to bond arrangements and requirements around fees and charges. Finally, it will require that rent increases occur by a fixed amount explicitly set out in the site agreement, including the formula and method for calculating a rent increase. This way prospective residents can know exactly what they are entering into and what the costs can be so that they can do

everything possible to mitigate the risk of them ending up in severe financial circumstances and/or not being able to get out of those circumstances should they wish to change their arrangements.

I will move to the other aspect of the bill, which is to improve consumer transparency so that consumers, particularly at that most vulnerable point in time – that is, when they are making funeral arrangements – know what they are getting into. Of course everyone at one time or another in life is going, unfortunately – it is just part of life – to have to undertake this kind of organisational activity. I am trying to think of how to describe preparing for a funeral.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, exactly. This is just a part of life. I do remember, if I can take myself back 30 years to when my father passed away, my mother and my brother and I were just in a blur. I think that is pretty typical of grief. I remember distinctly having to try and choose coffins – I am not trying to be too macabre; in this context it is relevant – and you feel torn because you think, ‘We have to respect my late father’s memory.’ You have got a terrible cheap-looking horrible thing that you feel embarrassed about and then you have got the top-of-the-grade thing. Because you are so emotionally torn and invested in that situation, you really do not want to be making those decisions, but you have to because you have to honour the memory of your loved one, and you want to do that.

I am so thrilled – I am actually relieved; it is relief I am feeling – that there is a much more up-front mechanism now in place to ensure that when you are in that haze of grief and pain at least the difficulty of making those decisions is minimised. It is far simpler, and it is just fairer, so that you can actually focus more on nurturing that emotional vulnerability that you feel at that time instead of having to really stress about the cost of the funeral per se. Then maybe you can spend more time looking at flowers but also connecting with your relatives and the other aspects, which are truly far more important on an emotional level.

I know I did go off on a little bit of an emotional tangent on that, but the fact is that is what funerals are. They are extremely emotional situations. But here we are, putting practical mechanisms in place to ensure that those processes are at least a lot more equitable and transparent and you can focus on the elements of the actual ceremony or event that are truly meaningful to you, rather than being burdened by confusion over what exactly you are investing in when you are seeking to honour your loved one in that situation.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (12:32): I rise today – and I often say I will make this brief, and that never happens. A long story short has never happened before in my life. There are a few things that I do want to put on the record and comment on in this bill, the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024, and the residential parks is probably a good place to start. We do have quite a few of these in my electorate; they are mainly used for workers accommodation. In fact I know a lot of the corporate farms have gone through the process of trying to get dwellings for workers accommodation on-farm, which has been very, very difficult, so in a lot of cases putting residential caravan parks on their properties or other land that they own has been a way that they can actually do it – or dispersed camping or whatever the case may be.

A lot of these residents can be long-term, season to season, but they can also be quite transient and move around. A lot of the big farms will also have residential parks in different regions. When you have farms or companies that own almonds in Robinvale, potatoes over the river, strawberries down near Shepparton and stone fruit through the Swan Hill–Murray Valley region, to have standardised forms makes sense. It will probably have minimal impact as far as the industry goes, and stakeholder feedback, from what I understand, has been quite positive.

It is a good thing if we can make it a little easier for workers accommodation to exist in the form of caravan parks. I will give the almond industry – or the nut industry, with pistachios as well – in our region as an example. The workforce, particularly that we use, are grey nomads that come down with their caravans. There are also, obviously, permanent cabins around what are effectively residential

parks, but the workforce is grey nomads that spend their winters up in north Queensland and the Northern Territory, travelling around doing all that wonderful retirement living in caravans. Then they will come and drive shakers, drive pick-ups and drive machinery during the summer and harvest food for things like almond milk and almond meal and all sorts of other things that almonds contribute to the food chain. So it is actually a good thing. It is highly regulated already. To have standardised form and agreements is a good thing.

I also did want to touch on the amendments to the Funerals Act 2006, which have come about due to the changes in legislation in other jurisdictions. It is obviously very important in cross-border communities, as we have heard the member for Ovens Valley point out and also the member for Morwell, to have that standardisation. In cross-border communities, and I understand that it is difficult to get your head around if you have never lived in a border community, but in a lot of these places – I will use Mildura, Wentworth, Gol Gol and Buronga as an example and Robinvale and Euston as another one – infrastructure is largely on the Victorian side but the development that we are seeing is on the New South Wales side. So a lot of people live and build their forever homes on the New South Wales side but deal with everything in Victoria: they work in Victoria, their kids are educated in Victoria and the cemetery is in Victoria. It is very important for cross-border communities to have Victoria change in order to ensure that the legislative requirements are broadly similar to New South Wales and SA.

SA is exactly the same. My electorate and the member for Lowan's electorate go right over to South Australia. When you have got people living in Victoria – Murrayville is a perfect example. It is a town of nearly 300 people, but Pinaroo is over the South Australian border. They are very closely connected. We saw in COVID that having those borders closed meant that the residents of Murrayville could not go interstate to get their fuel, which is what they had to do largely. There is a supermarket in Murrayville and there is fuel there now, but when those borders were closed they were left without fuel and they could not travel far from home. That was a pretty scary prospect. Some cross-border thinking is a step in the right direction, and it needs to follow all the legislative requirements of course.

I did want to spend a little bit of time talking about death, given that is the nature of the funeral industry. We have heard several stories today about grief and organising funerals. We have heard about the member for Euroa's near-death experience after an altercation with a wombat, which has caused many a problem to her baby, to the person that she is carrying – quite scary. I certainly have never been attacked by a wombat, but I cannot imagine that it was a nice experience. My family is currently in the process of planning my Uncle Charlie's funeral. He passed away on Friday after a long battle with illness. Uncle Charlie only came into our lives 20 or 25 years ago, after we discovered that my Italian grandfather, having lived here before his wife arrived, had a whole other family. The two brothers and the sister, when we found her after adoption, were welcomed into the family and have very much been a large part of our family, for all of my adult life in fact. We lost his daughter Nerida many years ago. When I heard at the family wedding on Saturday that Uncle Charlie had passed away the day before, I thought, 'I know his daughter Nerida will be waiting for him with open arms and that big beaming smile of hers.' I know that they probably have not stopped talking since. So rest in peace, Uncle Charlie.

I also wanted to pay tribute to a high school friend of mine who was tragically killed in a race car accident, actually, a couple of weeks ago. Again, you see the prices. Someone who is 45 years old obviously is not expecting something like that to occur, regardless of which state you are in. He was in Western Australia. You see the GoFundMe fundraisers that come out after a tragic incident like that and the amount of money they have to raise to be able to pay tribute to their loved ones. Having to go through all of that rigmarole, as we have heard many members on both sides today talk about, you are in such a blur at such a tragic time. If we can at least look into it and see very clearly what the costs associated with burials are, then that is a good thing. But I did want to take a moment to pay tribute to that very old friend of mine that I went to school with who, like I said, was tragically killed in a racing car accident a couple of weeks ago. Vale, Evan. He will forever be 45.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (12:40): I too rise to speak on the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. I have been waiting to speak on this bill and these issues before this house for some time. I am just looking around because I did see the minister here, the honourable member for Dandenong, just briefly before. I thought it was great that she was here listening to this bill before the house.

I am so proud to be able to stand here and talk about it, because this bill addresses issues and challenges and is now providing the solutions and opportunities for folks not just in the Laverton electorate but right across Victoria. I would like to say ‘seniors’, or those just a little bit older and wiser than me; it is really the people 55 years and over who are living in residential parks. This is a wonderful opportunity for folks in this house to talk about some of the many, many challenges these residents have been facing. This bill is going to address them and solve so many of those challenges, and I am going to talk about that today.

I want members in the chamber to imagine for a second that they are in their late 50s – here is the minister here. You may not be far off being in your late 50s. Maybe you are in your early 60s and you are looking to downsize your home. Maybe your kids have moved out of the house – they have flown the nest, as they say – and they no longer need you to have that really big home you have been living in. Maybe you are a renter and you have saved up some money to move into a residential park unit. Or maybe you have retired and you are looking for a place that has that wonderful sense of community, with fabulous people who want to do things with you in those later years of your life. That is what residential parks can be about, and it is what attracts so many people across this great state to live in them.

In my electorate of Laverton I happen to have two of these residential parks. There is Palm Lake Resort in Truganina, which I have been to on many occasions – so many I have lost count. There are great people living there. Each time I go there I am absolutely amazed by the warm welcome I receive from residents. There are awesome residents, and I am going to name two of my faves: Neil and Carmel. I know that they will be listening to this speech. This is to name just two that are in Trug and that watched just a few weeks ago when I spoke about our government’s proposed reforms, of which this bill acquits just a few. There is also Ingenia Federation village in Albion, just along Ballarat Road. Since becoming the member for Laverton I have got to know the folks living in that residential park and heard about their experiences and their passion for their community and the Albion community. These are amazing people. They are mums and dads; they are our mums and dads.

After speaking with both communities, it quickly became clear to me some years ago that there were things amiss. I was starting to hear some pretty terrible things, some issues that we are going to tackle in this bill, and they were common – they were shared across the residential parks and shared by residents who lived, let us face it, on either side of my electorate. These issues included things about how rent was calculated. In many, many instances I was told that residents were paying up to half or even more than half of their pensions to cover the rental costs. There were maintenance issues – things like rails and ramps – that required residents to basically hound their managers just to get fixed. Rails and ramps may not be an issue when you are 55, 56 or 57 when you move in, but if you are staying there well into your 60s and 70s and 80s and hopefully beyond, they become things that enable you to get out and about in the local area and do all the fun stuff that you moved into the residential park for in the first place.

We are talking about things like exit fees. If you are a resident, you cannot just leave if you do not like the way the park is run. You have to pay a percentage of the value of that demountable home in order to leave – you cannot just leave. What that means is that residents often find themselves effectively trapped in their own homes because they must pay for the privilege of leaving. These are just some of the issues that have been raised with me when it comes to living in these residential parks. Some of the conduct of managers and these companies running them is absolutely unconscionable, which is exactly why we are here in this place today talking about reforms in this bill that will change the way things operate.

You would be forgiven for thinking that these parks are retirement villages. I have walked into them and thought, 'My God, I would love to live somewhere like here when retiring with my husband Scott. This is fabulous. Some of them have cinemas. They have spas. They have pools. They would be great places to retire to.' But since I have been scratching beneath the surface I have found that sometimes they are not great places to retire to, and we need them to be. We want them to be great places for folks to live in and spend the later part of their lives doing all the things they imagine themselves being able to do. They deserve to do that, and that is what this bill is about.

We did a lot of incredible work in reforming the Retirement Villages Act 1986 to give better protections to elderly residents who live within these communities. But residential parks are not retirement villages, and under the current legislation they are actually classified, shockingly – can you believe it? – in the same category as caravan parks. We have got the member for Melton over there; I know he is an avid caravanner, or I should say motorhomer, now. And as a camper I should say these are not caravan parks. Palm Lake and Ingenia Federation retirement villages are not caravan parks.

I want to acknowledge the most incredible woman – I know that there are many members of the house who will do so today, because she has advocated tirelessly for some of the most vulnerable Victorians right across the country who are living in these situations – and that is Judith Duff. I know Judy, and I know she will be listening today. I want to give you a big shout-out, Judy. You are an incredible woman, absolutely incredible. This bill is before the house and there are members on both sides of this chamber talking about these important changes today because of you, Judy. You have done good – you have done real good.

Judy heads up the Manufactured Home Owners Association Victoria, and we have had many, many, many discussions about the challenges folks are facing. Judy has been instrumental in going around and talking to other members in this place about the parks in their electorates. She has gone out across Victoria and talked to folks about the situation that is happening in their parks and about what is going on – I do not like saying that they are caravan parks, because people do not consider them as parks; they consider them their home. These conversations and your advocacy, Judy, have been listened to. When I heard a few weeks ago the minister announce that we would be tackling these issues by introducing much-needed reforms for residential parks, I was so happy and so satisfied. I know, Judy, that you will be over the moon. You will have been at home having a cup of tea listening to the whole debate this morning and this afternoon.

I note that the opposition will not be opposing this bill. The changes we make here today will be absolutely life-changing for the residents who are out there listening. As a result of this work the minister has commissioned the commissioner for residential tenancies to go and partner with the Consumer Policy Research Centre to review this sector so that we can continue, importantly, to strengthen protections for residents who live in these parks. We are not waiting for this review to make the change, and that is what is most important. There are things that we know are not working, and they can be fixed right now. That is why they are before the house today in this bill.

In my eagerness to talk about this, I have run out of a lot of time for the changes in the bill. I know my colleagues who have met with Judy are going to talk about some of those changes. I do want to give a huge shout-out to the minister, who has expedited the reforms in this space and brought the bill before the house today. The minister has been an absolutely fabulous friend to the likes of Judy and the many hundreds, if not thousands, of vulnerable Victorians that she has been representing. The minister has listened, and she has gone ahead and found some solutions and opportunities for change and legislative change that will make people's lives in these residential parks so much better. So I do want to give a big shout-out to the minister. It has been a long time coming. Judy, I am going to end by saying a big thankyou to you. I commend the bill to the house.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (12:50): I speak today in support of the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024, and I thank the government for bringing forward this piece of legislation. I have a few contributions to the debate, as there are some issues that this bill seeks to

address that could benefit from further consideration. The Greens will be supporting this bill because it makes a start in addressing some of the areas of concern for the thousands of older Victorians, especially those living in land lease villages, and it strengthens consumer protections in the funeral industry. As a state, we have been lagging behind other jurisdictions on both of these issues. The government has taken an important, albeit small, step in the right direction with this legislation.

Land lease villages are a rapidly growing sector, one that has had little to no regulation or protections for residents. Approximately 22,000 older Victorians, many of whom are retirees with limited financial resources, live in these villages, and without proper protections and oversight of operators, the residents remain vulnerable. The Greens strongly support the bill's introduction of standardised site agreements as they will provide much-needed consistency and fairness. For too long many residents have been pressured to sign complex, non-standard contracts, contracts that have at times been unfair or misleading, placing undue stress on those residents. Everyone in this state is deserving of transparency and proper protections when it comes to their homes. This has been a key ask from stakeholders for a very long time, and this part of the bill is particularly welcome.

The bill seeks to make some necessary changes, but there are further issues significantly impacting land lease villages that we should also be taking action on. While the provisions regarding precontractual disclosure and defining the CPI referenced in rent increases are not objectionable, they are relatively minor compared with more significant issues that the residents are facing. Victoria needs a registration system for land lease villages, similar to those in Queensland and South Australia. There should be reliable data on the number, the location and the size of these diverse villages as well as a record of site owners.

Further, this bill does not address the unfair and exploitative fees that residents face. The dwellings in these villages represent major assets, often a resident's entire life savings. Residents can come up against unbelievably exorbitant exit fees, and their homes can only be sold with the landowner's consent. The unacceptable power imbalance that exists between residents and the landowners needs further remedy.

The dispute resolution processes that are currently in place are inadequate. Residents have shared stories with me of intimidation and of retaliatory moves by the managers. Establishing a retirement housing ombudsman, a dedicated service to provide free, fair and binding determinations, would be far more effective than having to go through VCAT, which is an impossible option when facing wealthy site owners. These owners are often large businesses with legal representation at their disposal and money to burn.

In summary, the Greens support this bill because it addresses important issues and represents a positive step forward. However, I urge the government not to become complacent. We must continue to consult residents, listen deeply to their concerns and remain committed to further reforms that protect them from exploitation and abuse. I look forward to the report from the commissioner's research project, which will hopefully lead to more comprehensive legislation that truly addresses the needs of land lease village residents in Victoria.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (12:55): I rise to speak with pleasure on this bill today, the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024, and it pleases me greatly to see that there is multipartisanship on this bill. It is being supported by all in the chamber, which is a fantastic position to be in, because I think, as many have noted, this bill is all about enhancing transparency of information so that Victorians are better informed when they make their choices as consumers.

Finding somewhere to live and the loss of a loved one are two of the most stressful life events that people can go through. When we are looking for somewhere to live there is a lot that we take into consideration, but there is often a really emotional response. People see somewhere, it looks lovely, it feels nice and they are drawn in, and then to not have transparency in the pricing and for people to find that they are then trapped in a situation that they feel quite vulnerable in when it comes to the amount

of money they have to spend is not ideal. This bill goes quite a long way to addressing that. We know there is more work to be done, but this is a great step forward.

I wanted to address, first and foremost, transparency in funeral pricing. Six years ago we lost Dad, and it was Mum and I who started to sit down and make all the funeral arrangements for him. It was sudden and it was unexpected. So there is the shock and the trauma of losing someone you did not think was going to be gone, and the next thing you know, a funeral director is there. And they are very empathic and calm, saying all the right things and being quite lovely at a time of great stress and sadness and shock, and then out comes the folder. The folder has a range of different things you can choose, and as the member for Albert Park mentioned before, one of the things to choose is a casket. At the risk of sounding macabre, this is the reality of it – and I think there are probably many people in the chamber who have been through the situation of arranging a funeral for a loved one.

Looking at it, Mum sees the first casket on the front page, and it is a beautiful one – if you can so describe one. It is made of solid wood, and it is quite lovely; it is very ornate. Mum says, ‘Oh, that’s lovely. I like that for Dad.’ And I say, ‘Oh, it is quite beautiful. Where is the price? How much is it?’ And the funeral director says, ‘I will come back to you on that. Just keep looking.’ So we keep looking, and there are other caskets, and I say, ‘I think they’re getting probably cheaper as we go through,’ because you can see the quality diminishes. So I am thinking, ‘Okay, the most expensive one I think is on the front page.’ Finally I say, ‘So how much is that one?’ And from recollection – I do not have an invoice for it; I have got an invoice for the one we ended up with but not that one – it was somewhere around the \$15,000 mark. And I said, ‘Mum, I think Dad would probably turn in that casket if you spent that amount of money on it, to be quite honest.’ And she said, ‘Oh, but it’s lovely.’ I said, ‘Mum, that’s a lot of money, and right now you’re very emotional, so let’s have a look at the other ones.’ And so we ended up with one that was about \$2300. I have just checked it, because I found the invoice for the funeral and all the costs associated. It was over \$11,000 for this funeral, which included cremation, so it was a lot of money.

But it occurred to me at the time that there was very little transparency in what was going on. At the time I owned my own business, and when you sell goods on a shelf you do not hide your pricing. You do not let someone go, ‘Oh, that food looks really tempting and lovely. I’d like to pick that up. I’m only going to find out at the point of sale how much that costs me.’ You would know at the point of selecting that item exactly how much it was going to cost, because that is what is required when you walk into a store. There is either a price tag on it – the old-fashioned way – or there is a price label on the shelf. It is not difficult to do. The reason it has not been done is because they have not had to do it. And what a shame and what an indictment on the industry itself that this opacity and obfuscation has continued for as long as it has.

So I am beyond delighted that, as a government, once again we have seen an injustice, we have seen something that basically does not pass the pub test and we have done something about it. Let us legislate to compel funeral services to be transparent and to be clear in how they price at a time of people’s deepest sorrow and greatest vulnerability.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Ambulance services

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. A MICA ambulance team had to be sent inside Maroondah Hospital to save the life of a woman having a heart attack, because the emergency department was full. Why couldn’t this sick Victorian get treated in a hospital even when she was having a heart attack?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I thank at the outset our hardworking paramedics and healthcare workers, who work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to take care of all Victorians. The Leader of the Opposition is referring to an incident that occurred at Maroondah Hospital and has been reported on in the media overnight and into this morning. Both the health minister and I have addressed this very clearly publicly, and I am happy to provide this information again to the house for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition.

The minister and I have been very clear about our expectations around how Ambulance Victoria and our hospitals work together, and indeed there are very clear protocols around how patients are transferred at that critical juncture between their ambulance care and into the hospital system. What has been reported as occurring at Maroondah Hospital has clearly not followed those well-established protocols, which is not an acceptable situation to the minister, me or the government. We need to ensure that this is not an incident that is repeated, which is why the minister has directed Eastern Health and Ambulance Victoria to undertake a full investigation to review this as a matter of urgency.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): In light of the Premier's reference just then to a full investigation, will the Premier now reconsider her refusal to appear before the ambulance inquiry in the other place?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): The answer is no. What I will be doing is continuing the work that we have done in the past number of years, where we have doubled the number of paramedics in the Victorian community and we have added an additional \$2 billion in funding. We support our hardworking paramedics, as opposed to those opposite, who went to war with our hardworking paramedics.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I would ask you to bring the Premier back to the question rather than debating the question, which she has started to do.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has answered the question.

Ministers statements: organised crime

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (14:05): I am very pleased to say that the Victorian Labor government will be announcing some further crackdowns on organised crime and bkie gangs, with some of the toughest laws in Australia. Unlawful association schemes, serious crime prevention orders and of course the banning and confiscation of outlaw motorcycle gang colours in our state are some of the serious matters that we are bringing before this Parliament and some of the new announcements of policy decisions that our government is making. We have already beefed up the confiscation of assets and unexplained wealth in this state. We have made those changes to the law. We are also outlining that proscribed organisations and their members will be banned from building sites and other government worksites so that those sites are free from the influence of those criminal gangs and organised crime.

Can I say also that those serious crime prevention orders will allow the Chief Commissioner of Police to make sure that those who are involved in serious criminal behaviour will be able to be prohibited from leaving the state. They will not be able to have firearms. They will not be able to have certain amounts of cash. These are the significant changes that we are making to the law that are in response to claims and requests from Victoria Police to continue to put the finger on crime, particularly around organised crime, to disrupt and dismantle it in this state. Our \$4.5 billion investment in Victoria Police – the largest police service in the country – is making sure that they have, through the VIPER Taskforce and Taskforce Lunar, what they need to disrupt and dismantle crime, make hundreds of arrests and lay thousands of charges.

Can I say in particular for organised crime in relation to wearing gang colours in outlaw motorcycle gangs, we know they do that to recruit members and they do that to intimidate Victorians. We will ban the wearing of those colours here in Victoria, and we will be able to confiscate those colours when

they are worn by outlaw motorcycle gangs. The test for those opposite, who did not back Victoria Police and tougher bail laws, is that when we put the bite on crime we want to have a bite with the mobsters and the lobsters. That is your form.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, ministers statements are not an opportunity for cabinet leakers to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Anthony CARBINES: Only the Allan Labor government can be trusted to keep the community safe.

Metro Tunnel

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): My question is to the Premier. Electromagnetic interference from the Metro Tunnel is forcing the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre to transfer their inpatients to other hospitals for MRIs. Why should these cancer patients suffer pain and disruption to their treatment because of Labor’s failure to manage the Metro Tunnel project?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Transport Infrastructure is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question because it gives me an opportunity at the outset to make it absolutely clear that as we get on and deliver the transformational Metro Tunnel project, which will deliver heavy rail services into the Parkville precinct for the very first time, providing better connectivity for patients and for staff, there has not been any impact on patient care during the period of construction, and now the testing phase, which we are in –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this was a very specific question and the Premier has had an opportunity to provide some background, but I would ask you to bring her back to the specific question.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Manager of Opposition Business to be succinct in his points of order.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, there is no point of order. The Premier was being relevant and responsive to the question. The fact that the Manager of Opposition Business is too busy thinking about his next stunt and point of order –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Brighton! The Premier was being relevant in that she was referring to patients at the hospital and she was also referring to interference from the Metro Tunnel.

Jacinta ALLAN: We are at the stage of this exciting and transformational project where we are having test trains running tens of thousands of kilometres through the brand new 9-kilometre twin tunnels, and we are at this stage of the project because our government has been determined to deliver the Metro Tunnel project.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Eildon is warned.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the issue we are trying to address is that cancer patients at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre have to be transferred to another hospital for their MRIs and then brought back to the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. Can I ask you to draw the Premier back so she can address that fundamental issue.

The SPEAKER: The question referred to why cancer patients are having disruption to their treatment. I believe the Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Of course when you deliver transformational projects of the size and the complexity of the Metro Tunnel, you have to work very closely with those institutions that will benefit from the delivery of the Metro Tunnel, and we have been. I want to thank the hospitals, the universities and the research institutes that sit within the Parkville precinct for the way they have worked with the project deliverers of the Metro Tunnel, because it will deliver improved services for the precinct. As part of that, we are at the tunnel-testing phase, the train-testing phase, and we have had something like 15,000 kilometres of train testing undertaken –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Polwarth is warned. Minister for Transport Infrastructure, this is your second warning.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question went to disruptions to cancer patients. The Premier has not addressed that fundamental part of the question, and I would ask you to bring her to the question rather than discussing the matter generally.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was answering the question as it referred to the Metro Tunnel project. I believe she was going to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: As the question went to the delivery of the Metro Tunnel and how we were working in with the services delivered in the Parkville precinct, I was making the point that as part of the train-testing process we do need to consider how we can continue to support the hospital services that are delivered. And I repeat, as I said at the outset of my answer, that there has been no impact to patient care. Indeed what we have done is put additional supports into particularly the Royal Melbourne and Royal Women’s hospitals so that they can be treated in those institutions.

Of course when you are delivering transformational projects like this, you have to work in a methodical way to deliver the projects, and we are doing it in a way that does not compromise patient care. Those opposite abandoned this program with an interest neither in patient care nor in train services for our state. We are determined to deliver this project. It will transform the way people move in and out of the Parkville precinct – patients, healthcare workers, cleaners, students, workers – and that is why we are absolutely determined to deliver the Metro Tunnel and work with our project partners to see this project realised, which they totally abandoned.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Croydon is warned.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:14): The Premier is willing to spend at least an additional \$888 million on undisclosed project disputes on the Metro Tunnel. Will this additional funding ensure that cancer patients can receive MRI scans at Peter Mac?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): I repeat, as I said at the outset, that we are focused on supporting patient care while we get on and deliver the Metro Tunnel project. We are continuing to work with our construction partners on both the delivery of the project –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier is being evasive. In two questions the Premier has evaded answering the question, and I would ask you to bring the Premier back to the question.

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity to have a view on the answer to the question; it is to raise a point of order on relevance or debating the question or the answer. I think the Premier has only just commenced her answer. I will say that she is being relevant for the moment.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was saying, we will continue to work with our construction partners to deliver this transformational project, a project that will transform the way people travel around our city and state and also a project that will be delivered a full year ahead of schedule.

Ministers statements: international students

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:16): Yesterday the federal government made the ludicrous decision to cap international student numbers from January of next year. ‘Naive’, ‘short sighted’ and ‘fundamentally destructive’ may be the most fitting words to describe yesterday’s announcement. I will not sugar-coat it. These caps will have a significant impact on the Victorian economy. I echo the words of Duncan Maskell, the vice-chancellor of the University of Melbourne, who said:

The cap on international students will have detrimental consequences for our University, the higher education sector generally, and the nation for years to come.

Some things are just common sense, and not capping the state’s biggest export is one of them.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bulleen is warned.

Tim PALLAS: In Victoria international students generated about \$14.8 billion in export revenue in 2023 and supported around 63,000 jobs. These changes put at risk almost \$5 billion of revenue and some 12,000 jobs. Since 2020 the state has invested almost \$150 million into our international education sector. We hold 30 per cent of the nation’s market share when it comes to international students. In enrolments across public and private universities, TAFEs and private colleges just this year, Melbourne was again named Australia’s best student city and the fifth best student city in the world. The Commonwealth’s cap threatens all of this. A cap on international students is a cap on economic growth, a cap on jobs and a cap on business investment, particularly in the inner city, where traders rely on international students to provide a key workforce and consumer base. The message the cap sends to international students is that there is a limit to their welcome here. This needs to be changed.

Suburban Rail Loop

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:18): My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier guarantee that the final cost of Suburban Rail Loop East will be no more than \$34.5 billion?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): Our government is committed to delivering the Suburban Rail Loop project, particularly the Suburban Rail Loop East section of the project, a project the Victorian community have voted twice for, and we are working to deliver that project within that \$34.5 billion envelope.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:18): The Auditor-General has found that Suburban Rail Loop East will ‘be more than 11 to 20 per cent over its current approved budget’. A 20 per cent blowout means a total cost of over \$40 billion. Is the Auditor-General wrong?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:19): I reiterate my answer to the earlier question. We are committed to delivering the Suburban Rail Loop project in the terms that we committed to the Victorian community –

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, we just want a straight answer from the Premier. Is the Auditor-General wrong?

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: There is not a project that we have delivered that those opposite have not been opposed to. Whether it is the level crossings –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bulleen, you can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question and evading again.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I have answered the question in the context of the budget, and in terms of delivering the Suburban Rail Loop project, whether it is level crossings, Metro Tunnel, North East Link, the West Gate Tunnel, suburban roads –

John Pesutto interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: The Leader of the Opposition asks me what they have in common –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is defying your ruling.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I spoke in terms of how we get on and deliver infrastructure projects. The common element of all of these projects is that the Leader of the Opposition and the Liberals oppose them every step of the way.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is unpleasantly debating the question.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: education

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:22): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is delivering real cost-of-living support for parents in the Education State. I had the great pleasure of being out with the member for Footscray –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister will be heard in silence. Member for Brighton!

Ben CARROLL: I was out at Footscray Primary School with the hardworking member for Footscray, a school that has for 160 years been delivering quality education. Under our government there is a \$20 million funding program to transform that school and add 200 places. We are doing the tutor learning initiative, the mental health in schools program, doing everything we can to support every student.

Today we announced that as part of the school saving bonus we are adding textbooks, because we know the cost of living is a real pressure on everyday families. That is why we are getting out and making sure that every student and every family in the Education State knows that we support them. We know that education is the single most important investment we have. It is the single most important investment we have to combat disadvantage. It is the single most important investment we have in our nation's productivity and prosperity. That is why Victoria has the best NAPLAN results, the best attendance results, the best teacher workforce and the best student-teacher ratios. It is why 50 per cent of schools built across this nation are being built right here. It is why we support our teacher workforce. We do not kick teachers out of the party room; we support them. We support teachers. That is why we make sure that teachers are front and centre of the Education State.

John Pesutto interjected.

Ben CARROLL: I would not go there if I were you, because we know Moira Deeming is going to do you slowly.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will come to order, and I ask members at the table to cease their verbal abuse across the table.

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, Kmart Keating should direct his remarks through the Chair.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Berwick is warned.

Ben CARROLL: On the point of order, Speaker, regarding the member for Malvern, the out-of-work barrister, in *Hansard* in 1933, Speaker Blackburn, under 'General principles' –

The SPEAKER: Order! What is your point of order?

Ben CARROLL: that it is not a point of order – said you cannot 'interject to prevent a member from making their speech'. The Premier cannot make a speech in here, and I cannot make a speech, without those opposite constantly interjecting right through question time.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. I ask the minister to direct his comments through the Chair. The minister has concluded his ministers statement.

Land Forces International Land Defence Exposition

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:25): My question is for the Premier. In two weeks the world's largest weapons manufacturers will gather in Melbourne for the Land Forces expo to showcase their products to trade delegates from around the world, including those that fuel Israel's genocide in Palestine and violent oppression across the world. The principal sponsor of Land Forces is the Victorian Labor government. In response to community opposition, Labor is mobilising 1800 police. The mounted branch and the riot squad will be there to ensure that this weapons convention can continue to operate in heightened local and global circumstances. Land Forces creates an unacceptable risk to safety, peace and social cohesion here in Victoria. Will the Premier be a leader for peace, step in now and cancel the Land Forces expo?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I did not hear the last part of the question from the member for Richmond. The member for Richmond will be heard in silence. Just the last part of your question, member for Richmond.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: Land Forces creates an unacceptable risk to safety, peace and social cohesion here in Victoria. Will the Premier be a leader for peace, step in now and cancel the Land Forces expo?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Narre Warren North is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): I thank the member for Richmond for the opportunity to provide clarity and completely reject her characterisation of the Land Forces conference that is being hosted here in Victoria in conjunction with the Australian Army between 11 and 13 September. This is an international event where we will be hosting visitors from around the world who will be engaging in a number of meetings alongside a trade and investment presentation from those involved in the defence industry. Yes, it is a defence industry conference, and it is an industry that is a legitimate industry and an industry that supports tens of thousands of jobs in our community.

As a government we do support the defence industry in terms of the work they do in employing tens of thousands of hardworking Victorians.

In terms of the reference that the Greens member made regarding risks to safety and peace, the only risk that is presented to social cohesion in this state comes from those who want to use conflict overseas to drive conflict on the streets of Melbourne. Anyone who does this should and must be condemned. They should not abuse the privilege of this place to stoke further fear and division. What we should be doing as a united Parliament is supporting those – whether they be from Israel or Palestine, whether they be from Ukraine or Russia, whether they come from Sudan, where there is horrific conflict – in all parts of the world. We should be showing them love and support and care, not using that conflict that is happening that is devastating families here.

I would suggest to any member of Parliament who wants to use events like this to stoke further division, fear and violence – because I can tell you what, having attended the state Labor conference, where the member for Brunswick was standing with people behaving in a completely unacceptable way – we have to show leadership. We have to show leadership on this critically important issue.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:30): The Victorian government’s responsibility should be first and foremost to this community, not to protect multinational weapons companies by bringing their wars –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Melbourne can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Melbourne withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER: I ask members on my right to cease interjecting and let the member for Richmond have her question.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: The Victorian government’s responsibility should be first and foremost to protect this community, not the multinational weapons companies by bringing their wars and their weapons to our peaceful city. Melbourne is a peaceful city, but the Minister for Police has threatened protesters, saying:

Every resource that we can bring to bear will come down on top of you.

Under the Victorian charter of human rights, police must respect and protect the right to protest. They must not use force or other measures to limit or disperse peaceful protesters. By international human rights standards, disruption, civil disobedience and peaceful direct action are keystones of the right to protest and are not considered violent either in practice or under the law. So does the Premier support the right to peaceful protest?

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, under standing order 120, I would ask you to consider – even if you took it away and considered it – the fact that this may be an opportunity for you to make a ruling on incitement. My view is that the words that the member is using are inciting and are undermining social cohesion, and I think it would be fair to say that both sides of this chamber have that view. I would ask you to consider making a ruling on that.

The SPEAKER: I take on board what the Manager of Opposition Business has raised. It is not a point of order. However, I do ask the member for Richmond to address her questions to the chamber according to the standing orders in relation to being relevant, succinct and factual.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:33): In answer to the member for Richmond’s question about whether I support peaceful protest, of course I do. My question to the member for Richmond is: does the member for Brunswick support peaceful protest, or does he support protests that result in violence? Does the member for Richmond support peaceful protest, or does she support protests that bring more violence to the streets of our city? Does the member for Prahran support

peaceful protest, or does he support his colleagues? Does the member for Melbourne? I say this because we will not be lectured by the Greens political party about peaceful protest, and I will not stand by and allow this sort of behaviour to come to the floor of this Parliament. This is the place for leadership, and on no more important an issue than social cohesion I will ensure that violence overseas does not bring violence to our streets.

Ministers statements: housing

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (14:34): We know there is nothing more important than finding a home – a safe, secure and affordable home – yet for many, many Victorians finding a home is becoming harder and harder, and it should not be. The Allan Labor government is doing something about this. If we are going to get more affordable homes, we need to build more of them and we need them close to jobs, transport and services. We need to share the places we love, but not everyone shares that view. Some start backing up the utes and tuning up the megaphones every time they hear of a housing project in their backyard. Their instinct is to block, not build, locking out younger generations from getting a home they deserve and stopping older generations from being able to stay close to the neighbourhoods they know and love. Their very own shadow housing spokesperson has called out this behaviour, labelling it immoral. And it is immoral and it is unfair.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, it is inappropriate for the minister to use a ministers statement to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to come back to her ministers statement without reflecting on those opposite.

Sonya KILKENNY: It is nasty. How nasty can you get when those opposite look to blame our newest Victorians and our oldest Victorians –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is defying your ruling and, I presume, reading from a speech.

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to come back to her ministers statement and not attack the opposition. Is the minister reading from notes?

Sonya KILKENNY: I am just referring to notes, Speaker. We will not scapegoat. We will not blame our newest Victorians or our oldest Victorians for the housing crisis. We say yes to more homes. We said yes to more homes in Frankston: 100 per cent affordable homes close to public transport, close to services, close to jobs. We said yes to over 300 homes in Sydney Road, Coburg, 195 of them affordable potential homes for nurses, for teachers, for retail workers, in a really fabulous location. And just this week, despite the objections from the member for Brighton, we said yes to 80 more homes in Brighton.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister has now defied you twice, and I would ask you to ask the minister to deliver something that does not just simply sledge the opposition.

The SPEAKER: The minister will come back to her ministers statement without reflecting on those opposite.

Sonya KILKENNY: The Allan Labor government is saying yes to more homes because this government's priority is making sure every Victorian has a home that they deserve.

Members interjecting.

Sonya KILKENNY: You can huff and you can puff; you are not blowing any more homes down.

Payroll tax

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:38): My question is to the Premier. Four Labor members – the education minister and Deputy Premier, the employment minister, the member for Mordialloc and the member for Box Hill – all secretly lobbied against Labor’s decision to impose an unfair schools tax. Why has the Premier imposed a tax which her own Deputy Premier does not support?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mornington can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Mornington withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER: Anyone else who is holding a pamphlet will be leaving the chamber as well. Members know that that is unparliamentary behaviour, and I am very disappointed that you would choose to defy the rulings of the house. The opposition leader was asking a question, and I think the Premier deserves the right to have an answer.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Narre Warren North can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Narre Warren North withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:39): I would like to thank my colleagues the hardworking member for Box Hill, the hardworking member for Mordialloc, the hardworking member for Eltham and Minister for Employment – who else did you mention? – and the hardworking member for Niddrie and Deputy Premier. Speaker, I would like to thank you as well, as the member for Bendigo West. These members are all hardworking members of Parliament.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, I ask you to ask the Premier to be relevant to the question. She is clearly fluffing around because she does not want to answer it.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was addressing the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will leave the fluffing alone, I think. I was acknowledging those hardworking members of Parliament for doing their job as a local member of Parliament, and I am proud that they are part of our hardworking team, supporting schools right across the state.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, I ask that you bring the Premier back to the question that was asked.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was asked about hardworking members of Parliament doing their job, and I am telling the Leader of the Opposition about hardworking members of Parliament doing their job. From time to time ministers will get letters from members of Parliament on particular issues in their electorate. Clearly in this instance there were letters that were sent to the minister on this particular matter. It reminds me of a time when I was busy removing level crossings as the Minister for Transport Infrastructure – very busy –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual. The letters were not sent to the minister; the minister wrote one of the letters.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: In the context of members of Parliament representing their communities, whilst we were removing level crossings, which was routinely opposed by the Liberal Party, I remember the member for Croydon asked me to remove a level crossing in his electorate.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question was specifically around the imposition of a tax, and the Premier has not even referred to her tax yet.

The SPEAKER: It did refer to letters to ministers. I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I would hope Victorians see that this is members of Parliament representing their communities, advocating on their behalf, just as others have done by on one hand opposing level crossings but secretly asking to remove the one in their own backyard. I thank my colleagues for doing their job.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Minister for Transport Infrastructure, it is becoming very tiring for me to hear your voice today.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, I stand to be corrected, but the member for Bulleen was warned once and then removed from the chamber. The Minister for Transport Infrastructure has repeatedly been interjecting. You have warned him three times, yet he remains in the chamber. Can I seek some clarification?

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:44): In his letter to the Treasurer the member for Box Hill said:

Many Kingswood College parents are hardworking two-income families who make significant financial and personal sacrifices to send their children to that school and who do not have the means to weather fee increases.

Why are such hardworking two-income families in Box Hill being punished with higher fees because of this government's schools tax?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mordialloc can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:45): I was asked about the arrangements with non-government schools, and I note for the record that 92 per cent of non-government schools have retained their payroll tax exemption, and we continue to support non-government schools in a range of different ways. I also note that the Leader of the Opposition referred to correspondence to the Treasurer. I too have correspondence to the Treasurer, asked by a member of Parliament, asking the Treasurer to consider directing the State Revenue Office to coordinate with local councils to identify likely vacant properties in their area for compliance. This was a local member of Parliament advocating for the extension of the vacant residential land tax in their electorate, from someone who opposed this proposal. Members of Parliament write to ministers all the time about a whole range of different issues.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: housing

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:46): I am delighted to update the house on the work our government is doing to build more homes for more Victorian families. When you consider why we are working so hard to build more homes, it is because we want young Victorians particularly to have the chance to live in the community that they grew up in, close to Mum and Dad, close to their family and friends, close to their jobs, close to perhaps great healthcare services, public transport and green space.

Last week I was delighted to join the Minister for Planning in such a location in the suburb of Camberwell, where we announced the start of our work on the 10 new activity centres across the state. When it comes to the community of Camberwell, it is a bustling community. There are shops, there are jobs, there are trams and there is a level crossing free Lilydale line running through the heart of Camberwell. Let me repeat that: a level crossing free Lilydale line. This is the perfect spot to unlock more homes for more young Victorians so future Johns and Janes can have the opportunity to live close to where they grew up, close to those important family supports.

These are exactly the sorts of communities that should not be locked up; they should be opened up. They have the services, the jobs, the infrastructure and the space to be able to locate more homes for more communities, more homes for more Victorians. We know those opposite oppose this every step of the way. We are getting on and building more homes for more Victorians.

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER: I would like to remind members that points of order are to be raised at the end of constituency questions, not at the beginning of constituency questions.

South-West Coast electorate

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (14:49): (780) My constituency question is to the Minister for Environment. Iconic tourist attraction the Princess Margaret Rose Cave in Nelson has been closed for three years because of government mismanagement. I ask: what is the government doing to ensure the reopening of Princess Margaret Rose Cave at Nelson? The cave closed due to government mismanagement and the frustration the then business owners encountered in trying to work with the government. They walked away due to no job security and no future understanding of what the government was planning. The government has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in the area, and it sits idle. This is one of several businesses that, due to government mismanagement of Crown land, have closed. The bait fishing business is gone. The canoe and boat hire business is gone, and in July the closure of the kiosk has had a significant effect not only on tourism but the local residents. The government needs to do all it can to ensure the reopening of Princess Margaret Rose Cave and grow the regional tourist numbers once again.

Bass electorate

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (14:50): (781) My question is to the Minister for Planning. Can the minister provide an update on the status of the statement of planning policy for Bass Coast distinctive areas and landscapes? In 2019 our area was declared a distinctive rural and coastal landscape with significant biodiversity and cultural heritage values, productive agricultural land and natural resources. In 2022 a total of 747 written submissions were received, and I want to thank those in the community who put them in, appeared at hearings and have been patient throughout this process. I was pleased that in February 2024 Bass Coast shire finally formalised its opposition to any residential development beyond Seaward Drive, Cape Paterson, and I want to thank this community for their collective advocacy and strong case for contracted boundaries. We as a community are seeking clarity and finalisation on the SPP to make sure this beautiful part of Victoria continues to be a great place to live, work and visit and is protected from overdevelopment and to ensure we make the right decision to preserve what we value.

Mildura electorate

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (14:50): (782) My question is for the Minister for Planning and comes from food and fibre producers throughout north-west Victoria, specifically the Donald, Charlton and Wycheproof areas. Will their families and farms be safe under the accelerated planning pathways for renewable projects when it comes to minerals sands mining projects that are on the horizon? There is very little clarity around what the accelerated planning pathways do and do not apply to, and farmers are concerned about the removal of the planning panel process, including third-party appeals to VCAT. They believe the lines are not clear – they are very blurry – and there are questions around the mineral

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sands, which are used in solar panels, batteries et cetera. There are young families returning to the area planning to build brand new homes on their farms, put down their roots and put their kids through school. So will their farms and families be safe, or will they be booted off their land as collateral damage?

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (14:52): (783) My question is to the Minister for Skills and TAFE. Minister, what is the latest information on this government's plan to secure a site and build a TAFE in my community of Sunbury? This government has a strong and proud record of delivery within my local community. The Gap Road level crossing is gone, Sunbury Road is duplicated, the Sunbury multideck car park is built, schools are upgraded and sports precincts are being delivered, but the commitment around the TAFE is a very important one and something that has generated a great deal of conversation and a great deal of excitement within the local community. I thank the minister for her outstanding and sustained work within the skills and TAFE sector, and I look forward to her reply.

Nepean electorate

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:53): (784) My constituency question is to the Minister for Children in the other place. I have been contacted by parents from Sorrento kindergarten concerned that children attending the centre may be displaced and other local children may miss out altogether. Currently five of the 50 children in the four-year-old program are repeating, meaning that only 45 students from the 50 coming up from the three-year-old year level will be able to move into that class. With the centre being capped at 50 students for each of those programs, parents now face the likelihood that their children will be displaced from the centre entirely. Many of these students who have missed out on a place next year are local families of the area and have had siblings that have attended the kindergarten. Some families from further afield have been offered places while locals have missed out. So my question is: will the minister step in and guarantee that local families in Sorrento, including those already enrolled at the centre, will not miss out on a place next year?

Monbulk electorate

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:54): (785) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. What is the Allan Labor government doing to support emergency services, including SES and CFA, in better preparing for managing severe storm events? This week we have experienced more wild weather across Victoria and in my electorate of Monbulk, encompassing most of the Dandenong Ranges. We face ongoing challenges in preparing for and responding to storm events. More is to come this week. On Sunday alone, Emerald SES responded to 45 call-outs. Since yesterday's severe wind event they have received another 80-odd requests for assistance and counting. Emerald SES and our local CFAs in district 13 have developed an arrangement whereby SES asks CFA brigades to attend calls when the requests for assistance exceed the SES unit's capacity to respond in a timely fashion. Our local CFAs have developed a taskforce to deal with storm events and ensure that access to roads and damage to buildings and vehicles is being addressed as quickly as possible. Time is running out, so I say thank you to our emergency services volunteers.

Mornington electorate

Chris CREWHER (Mornington) (14:55): (786) My question is for the Minister for Water. Minister, on the closed and over 100-year-old Beleura Cliff Path in Mornington, can you provide information on any review the state Labor government is undertaking of the privacy rules on the use of tap water, which are making it difficult for Mornington Peninsula shire officials to approach local property owners, particularly where severe and obvious overuse of water is causing damage to public assets. Beleura Cliff Path in my electorate has been closed following landslip damage in part due to insufficient drainage infrastructure as well as excessive water use by particular houses on Kalimna Drive in Mornington. Even the shire CEO cannot confidentially obtain water usage figures from a water retail corporation such as South East Water so that this information can be presented to house

owners to help say to owners to cut down obvious water overuse that is causing extensive damage to public assets.

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:56): (787) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for the State Electricity Commission, the SEC, regarding the Allan Labor government's support for Victorians to save money on their energy bills and switch their homes to electricity. I am so pleased that the SEC consumer pilot has been launched in three local government areas across Victoria – the City of Ballarat, the City of Casey and Merri-Bek City Council. How will the SEC consumer pilot support constituents in my electorate of Wendouree to switch to all electric? I would like to thank the minister for her continued support for the Wendouree community and for choosing my local government area, the City of Ballarat, for the rollout of the SEC consumer pilot.

Benambra electorate

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (14:56): (788) My constituency question today is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The information I seek is: when will Regional Roads Victoria repair the damage to Granya Road on either side of Granya in my electorate. This road has been restricted to just one lane under traffic light control in both directions for more than two years. I will say that again – for more than two years.

Danny O'Brien: Shame.

Bill TILLEY: Absolutely it is. On the northern side of the township temporary traffic lights funnel traffic into one lane to protect motorists from a compromised bridge and the gaping hole next to the road itself. On the southern side another set of traffic lights reduce traffic to one lane to avoid subsistence on the lower side of the road. Locals tell me this is no longer on Regional Roads Victoria's work schedule. It should be, and it should be a priority.

Frankston electorate

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (14:57): (789) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning, and I ask: when will the minister be available to visit Frankston to discuss the ongoing issues with residents at 5 Culcairn Drive, Frankston South. I ask on behalf of the residents of 5 Culcairn Drive, Frankston South, who I have worked with for some years regarding cladding issues but also the heartbreaking, expensive legal and building rectification costs they are facing presently. From lack of waterproofing and no sprinklers in the car park underneath to internal and external structural failure, this building should never have been approved for occupancy as it clearly does not meet the building code or owners' expectations. I have met with these residents on numerous occasions, including in Parliament with the former Minister for Planning, pleading for something to be done. Some progress has been made, but this is still a huge issue that needs attention as soon as possible. I cannot imagine how these residents feel, but I do know that if I put myself in their position it actually keeps me up at night knowing there is more that needs to be done.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:58): I have reviewed the constituency questions from yesterday. The member for Kororoit asked the minister to outline the benefits of a hospital, which is asking the minister for an action. I therefore rule the member's question out of order. As sometimes there is a fine distinction between asking a question and seeking an action, I encourage members to phrase their questions by beginning with who, what, why, when or how, as this will generally avoid confusion about admissibility. If members are in doubt about whether their questions meet these requirements, please run them by me or the clerks.

The member for Hastings asked a broad policy question that he did not link sufficiently to his electorate or constituents, and I therefore rule his question out of order. I will again take this opportunity to remind members of my rulings and those of previous speakers that constituency questions must relate to constituents' issues and not encompass broader policy issues, which can be included in questions on notice, and that members asking constituency questions should ensure that it is clear how their question relates to their constituency.

Bills

Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (14:59): When I was previously speaking, just before the break, I was talking about the process for arranging a funeral during what is often a very, very emotional and sorrowful time for people. I had a bit of a look at the website of one of the funeral houses to see if there was any kind of transparency on their coffin range. I jumped online and I downloaded the brochure. I will not mention the name. As I scroll through this PDF document – there are about 81 pages in this document – I can see there is 'majestic gold', there are great descriptions on these caskets and there is a lot of information about the wood and the finishings. There is not a single price to be found, and that, in and of itself, is a disgrace, so I am absolutely beyond pleased that this bill is addressing this to ensure that there is transparency and that there is no opacity in all of this, because when people are incredibly sad and when they are emotional sometimes they make decisions that are not in their best interests.

It has been for a while that the funeral industry has been looked at. I know that it has been under some scrutiny nationwide. CHOICE themselves have previously reported on issues within the industry. It is not even just the uncertain pricing, where you have got no idea what it is until someone verbally tells you, but also there have been issues unearthed with misinformation and fees for no service. It is a highly concentrated market, and the ownership of the actual funeral provider businesses is also really unclear. The ACCC also released a report on funeral services, back in 2021, and it highlighted common issues. Once again, these were pricing structures lacking clarity and transparency, which may mislead consumers, and the bundling of goods and services that can limit consumers' choice and access. This bill is going to go a long way to addressing that, and it is about time that the industry actually did the right thing. It is a shame that legislation must be introduced in order to get this industry to do what is the right thing by consumers and by people in their time of grief. But anyhow, we are doing it. As I said before, I am delighted that this has got complete support obviously from government but also from the opposition, from the coalition and from the Greens. It has been wonderful to hear that they will be supporting this bill.

I did listen to others' contributions on the residential parks and the reforms there. Again, as I was saying right at the beginning of my contribution on this, finding a home is also an incredibly emotional time for people. It can be overwhelming. It can be exhausting. Sometimes one may not make the best decisions as well, depending on the need for the move. Not everyone moves because they have the choice and they want to move; sometimes people move because they have to. When they are in a situation where they have to make a decision, again, if they have not got all the information to hand, they sometimes can make a decision which works against their best interests, and that is problematic. This legislation will address the lack of transparency in residential parks. Even just requiring a site agreement to be in a standard form is going to make a big difference. It will allow the consumer to compare apples with apples. If you go to a few residential parks and everyone is presenting the information like all the others, you can actually sit there and make a really informed decision.

With pieces of legislation like this there are not great bells and whistles out there. Fireworks will not be lit because we have passed it, but it will have a tangible impact on the lives of many, many people.

In terms of funeral arrangements and in terms of residential parks it is going to be a game changer. For anyone who has to go and make a decision, as I say, sometimes in circumstances which are highly emotional or very stressful, there is nothing more important than being absolutely clear on what they are getting for the money they are parting with and also how much money they are parting with over time. Hidden fees and all of that will be brought to light. I am delighted that we have introduced this legislation. I again say that I am delighted too that it has got the support of the other parties in the room. I commend this bill to the house.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (15:04): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. I think this is a really important bill because it focuses on enhancing the transparency of information provided to Victorians so that they can make more-informed consumer decisions and choices. Having worked in the area of consumer law in a previous life, I saw firsthand the impact of the lack of information that is being given to consumers in a whole range of different areas, and those impacts can be quite severe. So it is really, really important that as legislators in this place we provide better informed decision-making wherever we can.

As I said, having accurate, comprehensive and readily understandable information is a critical consumer protection mechanism. It reduces the gap between the information that businesses have and consumers have and allows consumers to exercise their rights and know the terms of any contract or purchasing agreement they are entering into. This bill strengthens the regulatory requirements for information in two key sectors: residential parks and funeral homes. This is to ensure that Victorians have appropriate information when making critical decisions about their housing arrangements or when making funeral arrangements following the passing of a loved one.

We have heard a lot in this chamber today about those impacts – including from the member for Monbulk, who was on her feet before me – and about some of the circumstances in which people are not provided with the right information or not provided with information at all when it comes to making a decision and the importance of that and the impacts of that. Residential parks will be regulated under part 4A of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and are commonly marketed as a lower cost or alternative accommodation option for senior Victorians. Typically residents own a moveable dwelling or a small house and rent the land that sits underneath the dwelling.

With the existing pressure on Victoria's housing market, more Victorians are living in residential parks and there has been substantial growth in the land lease industry. As this sector of the housing market grows, the Victorian government needs to ensure that there are the right protections in place for consumers. We have put a lot of effort into improving the Residential Tenancies Act for tenants across this state. There has been some fantastic work around protecting tenants under the Residential Tenancies Act. We need to ensure particularly that we are covering more vulnerable people in our community who rely on living in a caravan park or a leased area of land to ensure that they have the same protections as everyone else.

We are also talking about the funeral industry. Again I will use myself as an example of someone who experienced the sudden death of their husband – some years back now. I do understand the pressure that is put on people to make decisions by funeral companies or funeral parlours or funeral homes – whatever we want to call them – at a really difficult time. You are not necessarily thinking the way you normally would or capable of making decisions when you and your loved ones are in a state of grief. So, in my circumstance, it got left to my father to make all those hard decisions. But I think if we have got the right information for people to make those decisions, we are addressing the protections and we are ensuring that they do have that information to make decisions around the cost of the casket, for example. And as the member for Monbulk highlighted earlier, when you look at funeral homes' websites, you do not necessarily get the cost of what that is going to be. I know in my electorate of Geelong we have some fantastic funeral homes who do amazing work, are very caring and take care of the community, but I am sure there are others that are not quite as caring and are not necessarily putting forward the options of the cheapest to the most expensive, for example.

Many people in my community have said, 'At the time I was so full of grief that I wanted my loved one to have the best' – the best casket, the best funeral service. But there have been consequences of that because then they have had this enormous cost that they did not really need to have. At least if the information around cost is presented to the family or the loved one who has to make that decision, they can then decide whether they want to go for the cheaper casket through to the most expensive. By having that there they are given that opportunity to make the choice, whereas at the moment I think there are some that are not presenting those options to families, particularly at a difficult time. We need to ensure that they do have that information and have the option to make that choice and that it is not just a fait accompli of 'Here's the information, here's the caskets, here's the costs for these particular caskets' without that being expanded to enable them to have – I do not like to use the word 'cheaper' – a more affordable option when they are making those decisions.

As I said, I have come from working in the consumer law area and dealing on a daily basis with people who had made decisions that were obviously poor decisions, but the information was not put before them before they made their decision and signed on the dotted line. They had huge regrets and severe financial implications, because in some cases they were conned into going into an agreement. I know in my electorate some of the funeral homes are very, very good and they do present that information to people when they are having that first meeting to discuss funeral options. This sort of information is very important to all our communities across Victoria.

As I said, I stress how important it is to my community, knowing some of the issues that come up at different times, to have the information. We know that housing is tough at the moment. In my electorate there are many people living in caravan parks. That is not to say they are not choosing to do that – that is fine, in mobile homes and those things – but there are some that are more vulnerable and are living in those caravan parks because they do not have a choice, so putting into legislation the provision for more accurate information for them to know exactly what they are getting into is really, really important. We are talking about some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. We are talking about women escaping family violence. There are all sorts of reasons why people are living in these caravan parks, so having the information there so that they know when their rents can be increased or whether there are other issues within the park that will impact on them is really, really important.

I know for my community, as small a change as this is, it is really important to them to have this information there, to have the funeral parlours covered in that and to have the Residential Tenancies Act taken into account. For those people who are living in caravan parks and on leased land, it provides those important protections. I commend the bill to the house.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (15:14): I also rise to support the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. The last bill that I had the opportunity to speak on in this place was the Youth Justice Bill 2024, which I think came in at just over 900 pages, and I thank the Minister for Police, who is here at the table, who contributed to many of those 900. Today's bill, as we know, is at the other end of the spectrum, coming in at just nine pages long. Nonetheless it does contain some very important reforms. Of course the bill amends in a number of places the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, which is a long, complex and important act.

I thought the member for Footscray earlier in the debate spoke very well about the funeral provisions within the bill in front of us. I think also the member for Hastings, who is still with us, spoke movingly about his experience with funerals and with the difficult circumstances people find themselves in when they are making those arrangements. I will not repeat those remarks, but I just endorse them.

Perhaps in my comments I will concentrate on the residential park provisions, which as I said amend the Residential Tenancies Act. We certainly deal with a lot of issues locally in our electorate around that particular act, and we also have quite a large residential park in Reservoir, Summerhill Residential Park, which has certainly over 200 residents in it. It is actually next door to a similarly sized retirement village, so we do very much understand the interesting state of affairs we have at the moment. If you

are in Reservoir and you drive up Gremel Road, if you turn to your left you go to the retirement village and if you turn to your right you go to the residential park. They have a very, very similar feel to them, those two places, but of course they are covered by very, very different regulatory arrangements. We will perhaps come back later to some of the detail on that. There is a whole, interesting history to that part of Reservoir as a former quarry and a former drive-in, back when drive-ins were a little more popular in Melbourne than they are today.

Anthony Cianflone interjected.

Nathan LAMBERT: I know sometimes the member for Pascoe Vale entertains us all with the history of his electorate. I might just leave it there. Suffice to say the area is now well and truly residential.

We in our office have worked very closely with Summerhill residents on a range of issues. I am sure other MPs work closely with their residential park residents. I will shout out to Jenny Low, Sue Hilton, Charmaine Brillanti and Kevin Wight. Kevin often gets in touch with me about a wide range of issues, and I am always happy to have his feedback and input. I know that when we were helping people with the power saving bonus, a great initiative of this government, a number of people who came into our office for help with the power saving bonus were from the residential park, and we had the opportunity to learn a little bit more about the circumstances that they face, while they were chatting to us. I should in that respect recognise the work of Darebin council, who also worked quite closely with them on issues related to embedded electricity networks in those facilities. They are not directly addressed by the bill today, but I think they go to the general challenges that are faced by residents, who often feel they are in a very significant power imbalance with the people running these residential parks.

Just before I come to the real specifics of the bill, I just want to acknowledge that the member for Mordialloc has worked hard on this particular issue for a long period of time, and more recently there has been the member for Laverton's leadership and advocacy. I know I have spoken to her at length about it. I also give great credit to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. She is a minister who really listens to people on these issues. She has been listening to caucus. I know she has been listening directly to residents of residential parks, and I think this bill reflects that wonderful approach that she brings to listen carefully to people.

The main point of bill is to make complex contracts simpler and easier to understand, and that is very important. Most of us understand buying a house – the basics of it. It is governed by the Sale of Land Act 1962 and other acts, but the general idea is you pay one large amount of money. We all have a sense of what those prices should be. No-one rings you up six months after you have bought your house and says you have to pay an extra 25 per cent. It is a relatively simple transaction for people to understand. If it is an apartment, there is a bit more with your owners corporation fees, but it is straightforward enough for people to understand.

Similarly, most of us in this place have rented a property at some stage. I spent about 20 years renting them. Again, rental arrangements, while there is still some more work we would love to do with them, are relatively simple for people to understand. There is the bond – of course it can now be a portable bond under the reforms of this government – but outside of that there are just the rental payments that you have to make each week or fortnight or month, and again that is relatively easy for people to understand. Both of those markets are very deep. You can get online and see different prices, so people can understand if what is being put in front of them is a reasonable offer or is not.

If we come then to residential parks, and I would say probably retirement villages as well, those financial arrangements are much more complex. Typically, people coming into these parks or retirement villages have some form of up-front payment to start with – a bit like you have when you buy a house. Depending exactly on the arrangement, you may or may not end up owning something out of your up-front payment. Then there is also almost always an ongoing fee in these arrangements. So to be clear, you have both a big up-front payment and you have an ongoing fee, and then often in

these contracts you have an exit fee. I would put it to you that these contracts are an order of magnitude more complex than those we face when buying a house or in a standard rental agreement. Frankly speaking, even members of this chamber, highly educated and articulate people, would probably find it difficult to back out of these contracts – what exactly they mean financially and how they would compare to a straight rental arrangement – because of the way that the costs are split up across those three different components. I noticed when I looked at this that the way that operators shift costs between those three components is very important, but it is very difficult for prospective residents to understand. That is not helped in any way by the fact that the contracts are also very inconsistent and difficult for people to read and understand.

I think previous speakers, and the member for Monbulk and the member for Geelong I think just then, spoke about the fact that many of the people entering into these contracts are not people who are in a position to have highly paid legal advisers and financial advisers help them understand those contracts. They are often people in very vulnerable circumstances. If I could wave a magic wand, I would probably get rid of the exit fees and the up-front payments altogether and just make it a straight lease, because then people could understand it more easily. I say that here. No doubt there may be other consequences of those changes – the minister's office will probably be horrified. They are fortunately conducting a review where they will go and look at those sorts of suggestions and see what the best way to approach them is. I make that point just to say that it is the complexity of the finances that is a problem, and then that complex financing is bound up in very inconsistent contracts.

That brings us to the rationale and the importance of the bill today. It will at least address the bit where those contracts are inconsistent and difficult to read by making sure that they are more transparent and that they are available to people in a prescribed form. I do acknowledge that there are probably good reasons for some of the arrangements, and, again, I am sure the minister in her review will touch on this. In a way the arrangements let people do what is effectively a reverse mortgage situation, where they can sell their house and move into these places. They will have the proceeds of that, because they will get more from selling their house than they will be required to pay up-front. The member for Berwick I think in his contribution touched on that. I agree that there is an understandable reason, but I worry that operators, at least in some places, are using the complexity of these arrangements to convince vulnerable people to sign up for agreements that, if they fully understood them, they would understand are not financially beneficial and actually compare very poorly to the much simpler act of selling their house and getting a straightforward rental agreement in a block of units. That is my real worry: if and when you could unpack these contracts and properly understand the finances, you would actually realise that these people are paying rental amounts that no-one in their right mind would go and pay if they could fully understand what they were doing. That is why the minister's reform is so welcome.

In closing my remarks I just recognise and thank Judy Duff, who many people in this chamber will know. Judy is a strong and wonderful advocate for everyone in residential parks. I know that exactly what we have in front of us today, standardised agreements, is something that Judy has been seeking for a long time. I know that she will be absolutely thrilled that the minister is delivering them, and she will also be thrilled that we have the review coming up, which will deal with some of the other things Judy would like to see. I understand she would like an entirely separate act, as you have with retirement villages. I am not sure. I think the right answer is to make things simpler and clearer for people and to give them more protections. Whether that has to be done in a separate act or whether it can be done within the Residential Tenancies Act will be a matter for the minister to decide, but certainly I appreciate the minister's work in that direction. I commend this bill to the house.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (15:24): It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to rise to speak on the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. I think it is fair to say that most Victorians, and indeed I think listening to today's contributions on this bill most people in this place, are very familiar with the really particular challenges that come along with caring for ageing and elderly family members and also dealing with the death of loved ones and everything that comes with that. I do note

some of the really heartfelt contributions by members around their personal circumstances and different times when they have had to deal with those.

Dealing with the death of a loved one is hard enough. Often it comes with grief. On the completely horrible end of that spectrum, it can come with some trauma and abject misery as well. That is why it is so incredibly important that we are making these amendments to this bill in a couple of areas, because when somebody is going through that grief and perhaps somebody is going through that trauma, the last thing that should happen is for them to be treated poorly through that process and to not have the consumer protections in place to be able to rectify that in order to be able to fight against some of that behaviour. There are many factors that come with that, and the government is committed to ensuring, through that process, that consumers – particularly those in vulnerable positions, grieving the loss of a loved one – are equipped with the information they need to make informed choices, because we do not want anybody in Victoria, particularly those Victorians going through what is perhaps the most challenging time of their life, to be treated poorly from a consumer protection point of view.

A recent CHOICE report highlights several concerning issues within the funeral home industry. I will do the funeral home industry first, and then I will get to residential parks after that. This includes uncertain pricing, misinformation and fees for services that are not rendered. Additionally, the ownership of funeral providers is often unclear in a highly concentrated market, making it even harder for consumers to try and protect their rights and rectify wrongs that have been done after the fact. It has created an environment where customers can be easily misled or overwhelmed, as I said, particularly during a time when they are least able to navigate complex decisions. In short, there have been some operators out there in this industry that have been engaging in what I would say is reprehensible behaviour and really preying on people that are going through the hardest time of their life.

In 2021 the ACCC, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, released a report on competition and consumer issues within the funeral services sector. This report underscores many of the problems that have plagued this industry for a very, very long time. It reveals that pricing structures often lack clarity and transparency, which can easily mislead consumers. Additionally, the bundling of goods and services, where essential items are packaged together often without a clear breakdown of costs, can severely limit customers' choice and access to affordable options. A loved one of yours passes away and you have the responsibility to plan a funeral and to pay the bills in respect to that. What we are seeing in this industry is just an absolute lack of clarity as to what each part of that process, each part of that funeral, is costing. It is frankly misleading behaviour by some, not all, in this industry. As I said previously, it is reprehensible. That is why we are here today debating this bill to make these changes. If you can imagine that situation where you are grieving and your family is grieving. You are trying to put to rest a loved one and trying to arrange a funeral, and at the time of your grief you are confronted with a barrage of decisions, many of which have hidden costs and unclear pricing. I think that we can all accept that that is just incredibly unfair and a situation that is not just unsustainable here in Victoria but must change.

It is incredibly important that we make the difficult decisions that these vulnerable people have to make easier, clearer and certainly less exploitative. By amending the Funerals Act 2006 we are bringing Victoria into line with other jurisdictions, like New South Wales and Queensland, and increasing the transparency of funeral home pricing. Under the bill funeral homes will be required to display a price list of all goods and services prominently on their business websites and within their physical premises to give some absolute clarity as to what you are paying when you are organising and planning a funeral. Furthermore, a separate price list for coffins must be published and displayed in the same manner. Failure to comply with these display requirements will be considered an offence.

As I have said, the notion that some providers within this industry would take advantage of people during what is always an incredibly difficult time is reprehensible. I have been part of planning funerals myself. I have witnessed and been with my father when he was planning my mother's funeral. It is

one of the hardest things that you will go through. You are grieving, often you are experiencing trauma, and you are trying to plan an event, a celebration of a life, so you can get closure. To be taken advantage of in that situation is something that we need to put an absolute end to, and that is what this bill and what these amendments certainly seek to begin.

The other amendment to this legislation is around residential parks. We do not have a lot of residential parks in Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing, although I note the member for Laverton's contribution on this bill – I believe it was just before lunch – and I know the member for Laverton has worked tirelessly through our caucus to advocate with the Minister for Government Services on this issue. There is a residential park just outside my electorate, in Laverton North, which is in the member for Laverton's electorate – a park where there really unfortunately was an incredibly horrible tragedy two or three weeks ago when a resident lost their life. Residential parks offer an alternative and often more affordable housing option, often for people who are retiring that have not been able to amass a large amount of capital to be able to retire through superannuation or other means. They can also provide affordable temporary accommodation for people experiencing something really difficult in their lives. That may be fleeing domestic violence, that may be the breakdown of a relationship or that may be having some real difficulty with finances through the loss of a job or something of that manner.

These amendments, once again, seek to and begin to provide clarity around some of those incredibly complex contracts that Victorians are entering into. As the member for Preston said, these are incredibly complex contracts that people are entering into, often at a pretty tricky time in their life. He rightly said there are not many in this chamber that would be able to work their way through those contracts competently themselves, even with a whole bunch of time. It is really difficult, and it is hard to imagine that people at those times in their life would be able to do that. These amendments are good, and I commend them to the house.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (15:34): I rise to speak in support of the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. I sat down with the fantastic Minister for Consumer Affairs to speak about this bill, and what she said to me really stuck with me. She said fundamentally this bill is about fairness. This bill is about supporting people at a time when they need support and putting those structures and safeguards in place so that when people are at their most vulnerable they get a fair outcome. That is just so emblematic of this government, where all we do is focused and based upon that principle of fairness and that extra support for people in vulnerable times. Something I am especially proud of the minister for doing is jumping into action on this. She could have waited for lengthy review processes, but she met with many consumers – many people impacted by the issues that are being addressed through this bill – and she heard loud and clear what the issues were and she acted swiftly and decisively.

We have heard quite a bit in the chamber so far about what this bill is doing, and I will come to that. We have heard about the changes to the Funerals Act 2006 requiring funeral service providers to display their goods and services price list and coffin price list on their website and in a prominent position at the business premises, making sure that there is a penalty for noncompliance and allowing regulations to prescribe the form and particulars for funeral price lists.

We heard earlier from the member for Monbulk, who had the experience of planning her father's funeral with her mother following his sudden death and sitting with the funeral director with the glossy brochure and the first image of a rather grand casket and, when inquiring about the price, essentially being told 'Don't you worry about that' or 'We'll come to that later' and the way they work their way down the scale of grandeur as they flick through the book with no prices. People, as well as experiencing grief and being overcome with emotion, are doing something they probably have never done before – you do not regularly plan funerals. Especially if it is the first time you have had to experience that, there is no point of reference, and it can be socially awkward and uncomfortable to talk about cost as it relates to a loved one.

I think I will be dreaming tonight about the story relayed by the member for Morwell, who spoke about, in his plumbing days – I am not sure if members were here for that – being called to a funeral home to service the crematorium and having to crawl into the burning section and refit the gas valves and having the funeral home staff shut the door and being in there. How terrifying. I will be thinking about that for a long time.

These pricing reforms are really important, and it is something that has been consumer led. We saw this from *Choice* magazine, which I am a subscriber to, and I would encourage all people to subscribe to *Choice*. We had the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission report and we have heard strongly from community members on this.

Another industry that this reminds me of – this and residential parks contracts or leases – is the mattress industry, where the same manufacturer provides the same goods to different retailers but each retailer has a different name for the same product. You cannot compare across retailers to find the best deal or understand what is going into it because, as with skincare and lots of things, they come up with lots of fake names for the technology, trademarked names for the technology, with no clear description of what it actually is. So I welcome this reform of residential parks and the funeral industry.

Speaking of cemeteries, I would like to dwell on the Yan Yean Cemetery. Yan Yean Cemetery in Yan Yean is taken care of by a fantastic trust, the Yan Yean Cemetery Trust, with Nevill McNees, the chairperson; Judy Clements, the vice chairperson and recent City of Whittlesea Volunteer of the Year award winner; Stephanie McCall; Tom McGillan and others. They care for this cemetery so beautifully. In fact Judy's family donated the cost of the construction of a beautiful chapel onsite there at the cemetery. That chapel would take your breath away; it is just gorgeous – I did not mean that as a pun; I just realised.

The cemetery is really old. It was first used in the 1850s because of the first labourer death among the employees working to build the Yan Yean Reservoir embankment. The Yan Yean Cemetery is very close to the Yan Yean Reservoir. Unfortunately, with practices as they were back then, there were multiple deaths during the construction of the Yan Yean Reservoir, and they had multiple labourers buried there at the Yan Yean Cemetery. The oldest headstone there was erected in 1858, and that is found near the two-trunked oak tree in compartment 2.

The cemetery has fantastic plans for expansion. When you walk around the Yan Yean Cemetery you get a slice or understanding of our community. It is an old farming area cemetery with lots of Mr Smiths and Mrs Johnsons and the like. The cemetery is now much more multicultural, and there are vibrant decorations on different headstones. There are sections dedicated to the Greek community, to Eastern European communities and, increasingly, to Indian-born community members, so it is nice to see the cemetery reflecting our community in that way as another indicator of how we are becoming more multicultural.

I touched briefly on the changes to residential parks. These reforms essentially are about enhancing protections for residents of residential parks, ensuring they have got access to relevant, clear information and that they are supported to make informed choices, not just when entering into these parks and not just when living in them but also when they seek to leave residential parks.

As I said at the outset, this bill is fundamentally about fairness, and this government is fundamentally about fairness. We just cannot help ourselves. In every portfolio in every way we will always work, reform, update and improve with the goal of improved fairness for all Victorians in all ways every day.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (15:44): I rise to make a contribution on the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. It is great to see this legislation being debated at this time. The Thomastown electorate has a number of village parks and a number of residents have approached me with concerns around the way some of the businesses operate. Before I get onto the local stuff, I will just give a bit of a summary of the parts of the legislation that I will be talking about

in more depth. I am sure that previous speakers have talked on this as well, but I just want to go through a couple of things.

The main parts of the bill are that we are going to amend, if this bill is passed, part 4A of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 to require that all residential park site agreements are in a prescribed form. I will make more reference to and give explanation of some of these terms later in my contribution. The bill will also provide a power to make regulations to prescribe and standardise a form for the site agreements and to expand the types of information that a site owner must disclose to a prospective site tenant before entering into such an agreement – things such as the name and contact details of the site owner, for example. There will also be a requirement that rent increases will be by a fixed amount. This will be explicitly provided in a formula and with a method to calculate the rent increase so that the resident who is paying the rent will know in advance what it is that they are going to be expected to pay and they will not be disadvantaged by any figure that the site owner comes up with.

Also, there will be amendments to the Funerals Act 2006 to require funeral providers to display goods and services and coffin prices online and in a prominent position in their business premises. I note that a number of previous speakers have described some really sad experiences where people have been at their most vulnerable in their grief and so on and funeral services have been provided in such a way as to take advantage of the person's grief when they were not really in a position to carefully calculate the cost and prices, particularly when they were not displayed anywhere and then perhaps there may have been no thought about asking what those prices were. The bill will also prescribe a penalty for noncompliance with requirements to display price lists and enable regulations to be made to prescribe the form and particulars of the way that those prices will be displayed and where.

In summary, all elements of this bill are to provide additional consumer protection to Victorians to ensure that they are better protected in these areas. Before I go into more of the detail of the bill, I would like to explain some of the differences. For example, what is the difference between a lifestyle village and a retirement village? What we are talking about in this legislation are the lifestyle villages, not the retirement villages. In the case of a retirement village contract it usually gives the purchaser or the owner a strata title or a leasehold over the land on which their accommodation is or will be built. However, the lifestyle villages provide occupants with a rental agreement. So they might purchase the dwelling, but then they must rent the land on which that dwelling is. That could be a caravan, for example, or a mobile home, or in the case of the places in the Thomastown electorate – the lifestyle villages Lifestyle Lyndarum or Lifestyle Wollert – it is a house, but it is on land that is owned by the owner of the lifestyle village. As I said, they are the two that I have regular contact with in the electorate of Thomastown. I do often speak with them and visit those places, and they will be very happy with the changes that we are making here.

First of all, in terms of the Residential Tenancies Act there will be a requirement that all residential park or lifestyle village agreements are in a prescribed standard form as determined by the regulations. What often happens, and what people have raised with me, is that the contracts are written in different ways, with different terms and in different sections, so that you cannot really compare one contract from one particular lifestyle village to the contract of another and you cannot clearly compare, in terms of the price and what sorts of facilities you might be getting, another place that you might be looking at as well. Standardising the agreements will allow consumers to easily compare, so that they can see if there is a big difference between the rental costs or type of facilities that might be offered in order to make an informed choice about where it is that they might want to be, because of course lifestyle villages are often the place you go after selling the family home when you are making your decision to retire or leave the workforce. The idea of the lifestyle village is that you sell your home, then purchase into a lifestyle village at a lower price because you are not actually owning the land, and of course you get an amount of cash that then you can use to enhance your retirement, whether it is just to top up in terms of the pension or if it means you want to do the stereotypical buying of the caravan and travel Australia or maybe go overseas or, as we often see – and this definitely happens within the Thomastown electorate amongst residents – give some money to your children so that they can also

improve their lifestyles, whether it is by helping with the purchase of a house or even in some cases assisting with supporting grandchildren.

On the prescribed standard form, we have spoken about that and how important that is to ensure people have proper freedom of choice and proper information in order to decide what sort of lifestyle village they would go to. Of course as this lifestyle villages sector of the housing market grows – and it is growing – the Victorian government wants to make sure that there are the right protections in place for consumers, for those who are selling, in most cases, their family home and moving into a place that they hope will be one of joy, less maintenance, less garden, more socialising and more facilities, where they can take up all those lovely hobbies that they may have once wished they could do and did not have time for before but expect they will be doing now. This of course is not the end of the reform that the Allan Labor government is looking at in terms of lifestyle villages and caravan parks when it comes to people living permanently. There also is a review into this type of accommodation, because it is growing and there have been concerns.

I have to give a bit of a shout-out, as the member for Laverton, whose seat I was in just before, gave a shout-out. But I also have to thank her because she has really led in a lot of this work in terms of the local MPs and raising this issue with the minister, who, as I said, initiated the review into this type of home ownership. Judith Duff is an unrelenting and dedicated advocate for those home owners in what is called the Manufactured Homeowners Association Victoria. She has been raising the concerns of residents on behalf of residents who find themselves in their forever last home but then have problems develop as part of the model that means that the land is rented, and of course that could end up meaning unexpected high fees or increasing fees without any sort of justification and making people's life not unhappy but less happy in their retirement than it ought to be. I have met with Judith Duff. I know a number of other MPs in this place have done so. We have all discussed with the minister's office and know that there is a very sympathetic ear with the minister in this matter.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (15:54): I rise to support the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. The bill will amend part 4A of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 to improve clarity for Victorians living in residential parks and will amend the Funerals Act 2006 to strengthen funeral price transparency.

Typically a resident living permanently in a residential park owns a movable dwelling such as a prefab, portable, relocatable or tiny home and rents the underlying land from the owner. Often people living permanently in residential parks choose them because they are affordable for low socio-economic or senior members of the community. The amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act will strengthen the protections and rights for those entering agreements with park or village operators and provide protections for more vulnerable members of society.

With more and more pressure on Victoria's housing market, Victorians are turning to residential parks, and there has been a growth in the land lease industry. Land lease communities are rapidly gaining popularity for working, semi-retired and retired people over the age of 50. They are different to retirement villages as the prefab homes built on the sites are technically movable, so the tenants enter into an agreement to rent the land the home is built on. Currently there are in excess of 20 lifestyle parks across the state, with more in production, and there are also multiple caravan parks offering land site rentals. As the population ages, downsizing is a popular choice for many senior Victorians looking for options for retirement.

Extensive consultation was undertaken as part of the Victorian government's review of the Retirement Villages Act 1986, which identified significant differences in protections and rights for those living in a land lease community versus those living in retirement villages, which are protected under their own act. I take this opportunity to thank former commissioner for senior Victorians Gerard Mansour for his work and advocacy during that review.

Part 4A of the Residential Tenancies Act currently dictates that the site agreement must be a written agreement between the site tenant and the site owner. It also indicates minimum information to be contained within the site agreement. However, it does not require the written agreement to be in a standard format, such as a residential tenancy agreement. This enables inconsistencies to enter into agreements from site to site and does not allow for potential residents to easily compare terms and conditions. This bill will amend the Residential Tenancies Act to ensure that site agreements are provided in a standard format. The site agreements will also provide clarity around the method and frequency of rent increases. They will specify that rent increases will either be a fixed amount according to a specified calculation method or a non-fixed amount. The bill will also increase the amount of information that the site owner must disclose prior to entering into the site agreement.

As part of the consultation for the Retirement Villages Act, many residents advised that the current agreements are too complex and the amount of information given prior to signing up did not allow residents to fully understand the costs associated with living in and exiting a residential park. The proposed changes to the Residential Tenancies Act will ensure that the cost of bond arrangements, additional site and park costs and fees and exit costs are fully disclosed up-front. In addition, the predisclosure will include the name and contact details of the site owner, the site owner's representative at the park and the proposed site agreement that is to be entered into to become a site tenant.

The protections being introduced by the bill will benefit the members of the community that need them most. Often, entering into a permanent agreement with a caravan park is made with members of the community when they are at a vulnerable point in their life and are seeking an affordable home when other avenues have been exhausted. Seniors moving into a lifestyle village are also potentially doing so as a result of the need to downsize for financial reasons or due to the unfortunate loss of a spouse later in life and may be seeking community support with others in the same situation. To have the knowledge that their rights are being protected will take some of the stress out of their move to their new living arrangements.

The Allan Labor government is taking steps to ensure the rights of residents of all types of housing are protected. Recent changes to support the rights of domestic renters were included in the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. Some key amendments in that bill were making rental applications easier and protecting renters' personal information, introducing a portable rent bond scheme, restricting rent increases between successive fixed-term rental agreements, a ban on all types of rental bidding and an extension of notice of rent increases and notices to vacate periods to 90 days.

The Allan Labor government is delivering on a key promise of the housing statement, with more support for Victorian renters and those with rental stress. The \$7.8 million rental stress support package will help families stay in their homes and prevent homelessness, and will back the vital work of community organisations addressing the high demand for rental assistance that has been seen across Victoria and in my electorate of Broadmeadows. The package builds on a \$4.74 million investment to support Consumer Affairs Victoria tenancy programs, including the tenancy and retirement housing assistance and advocacy programs. These programs helped more than 8800 Victorian renters last financial year with information and advice, negotiations and support and assistance with VCAT hearings. The Victorian government is working quickly to establish Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, which will support –

The SPEAKER: Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business for the matter of public importance.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

*Matters of public importance***Infrastructure projects**

The SPEAKER (16:01): I have accepted a statement from the member for Caulfield proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house recognises that ‘the Big Build ... is absolutely rotten’ (Nick McKenzie, 2024) and condemns the Allan Labor government for:

- (1) the disastrous CFMEU-driven cost blowouts exceeding \$40 billion across major projects, including the Metro Tunnel and North East Link; and
- (2) the wasteful \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop, which is pushing Victoria’s debt to \$187.8 billion by 2027, threatening the financial future of our state, and leaving Victorians across the state without their fair share of quality services and infrastructure.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (16:01): The matter of public importance (MPI) that I have raised today is a very important matter for every single Victorian. The crux of this is, as the beginning of this matter states, that this house recognises that ‘the Big Build ... is absolutely rotten’. This is not my quote, this is a quote from Nick McKenzie from the interview that he gave on 3AW condemning the Allan government for the blowouts, the waste and ultimately the corruption that we have seen in the Big Build, which I will come to shortly. This matter of public importance goes to the heart of why under Premier Allan, while she was the Premier and previously the infrastructure minister for 10 years, we have seen massive blowouts on all of our infrastructure projects – \$40 billion of blowouts in our infrastructure projects – and it goes to the core that Premier Allan cannot manage money or major projects, and Victorians are all paying the price.

We will discuss the CFMEU blowouts, which have led to a 30 per cent increase on \$40 billion of major projects, including Metro Tunnel and North East Link. And haven’t we heard so much about that in the last two weeks? The Metro Tunnel specifically was seen as a great project to be delivered before time and on budget. If we did a cost–benefit analysis of that project at the moment, the cost–benefit analysis would be in the toilet. It has blown out by \$4 billion, with another \$888 million that we heard of today. Again, in terms of the benefit, what do Victorians get? Slower trains. What a Third World concept that is – to spend \$14 billion to only get slower trains. What an absolute train wreck it is, member for Bentleigh, the Metro Tunnel.

But wait, there is more. We will talk today about the \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop, a project it was said that was going to change our lives – absolutely change our lives. The costings were done on the back of a napkin. We know that because every single time every expert from the Auditor-General, from the Grattan Institute, from Infrastructure Victoria and now from Standard & Poor’s – what do they all say? It does not stack up. Even the Allan Labor government’s mates in Canberra – what have they done with the Suburban Rail Loop? They have crab walked away. They have said, ‘Do you know what, it’s not our project. The \$11 billion that you had us down for, we’re taking that back. We’re going home.’ And that is because this government and Premier Allan cannot manage money and cannot manage major projects, and all Victorians are paying the price.

When we look at this I want to come back to the core and the beginning of this MPI: the big rotten build. I would like to draw the house’s attention to those comments made by investigative journalist Nick McKenzie on 3AW. Nick McKenzie labelled the Victorian build as:

... absolutely rotten ... organised crime profiting like mad and very little is being done to stop it.

He then went on to say, when asked about his thoughts on the Premier’s response to the CFMEU allegations:

She is about two and a half years late ... I think the Premier’s lack of response is very, very serious ... we shouldn’t be living in a gangster state ...

This is the Premier that has done nothing for 10 years, that has sat on her hands and allowed the CFMEU to profit. Whether she has been the infrastructure minister or the Premier, Premier Allan has done nothing but allow the CFMEU to run the show on major infrastructure. That is why we have \$40 billion worth of blowouts. That is why each and every hour in this place, in this state, we will be paying \$1 million just to pay the interest on the \$188 billion that we have in debt, record debt – more debt than New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland combined. That is why – because this state, and particularly this Premier, cannot manage money. Premier Allan cannot manage money on major projects, and Victoria is paying the price.

Let me get onto the 2½ years late of doing something about this. In May 2023 I asked the Premier, when she was the minister responsible for infrastructure in this Parliament, what action she had taken to ensure there was no further illegal activity on projects that she was responsible for. Her answer was, ‘Nothing. It’s not my problem. I will leave it up to the contractors to worry about it’ – absolutely nothing. Imagine if 16 months ago Premier Allan actually did her job and investigated that and, like we are seeing now, put the CFMEU into administration. Imagine the millions and millions and billions of dollars that would have been saved on major projects and infrastructure in this state. But 2½ years ago the Premier said, ‘Not my problem.’

When Nick McKenzie starts doing his work, all of a sudden it is ‘We’ve got to start doing something.’ Even now it is slow, even now there is nothing and even now there is not enough. There is a good reason why Premier Allan and the Labor government here in Victoria have been very slow to act: money that has been donated to the Labor Party to get them re-elected by –

Members interjecting.

David SOUTHWICK: Thank you very much – the CFMEU. You know what, it is very hard to cut out your friends when they are paying you to ensure that their donations get you back into this place. There are many people that have been elected to this chamber from the Labor Party that thank the CFMEU every day for their donations and have not been too forthcoming in calling them out for their corruption. That is something that we should remember.

Let us go to the core, which is about these blowouts on major projects – \$40 billion in major project blowouts. Metro Tunnel, \$14 billion – a project with a \$4 billion blowout plus \$888 million, which we have just found out about. But that is just the beginning, because what happened was, again, in June the Auditor-General reported that there was going to be no money left in reserves, in contingency, to fund the rest of this project. You would think at that point in time the Premier and the Minister for Transport Infrastructure might say, ‘Well, we’d better actually look at what we’ve got to do with this project.’ Do you know what they did? They wrote to the contractors and said, ‘How about we give you some more money so you can get the project delivered in time for the next election? And you know what, for any of those problems on there, we will sign away any legal obligation because they are obviously not your problem’ – the contractors causing the problems – ‘they are our problem, the government’s. So how about an \$888 million bribe to go quiet?’ \$888 million to silence the contractors – how about that?

But, do you know what, we have not seen the response yet. That was a letter from the government. We have not seen the response, so who knows how much Victorian taxpayers are on the hook for for Labor’s mismanagement and waste. All we know is one thing for sure: it is going to be a lot more than \$888 million. This clearly shows this is not just Labor, because we have been saying this for a long time, but this is Premier Allan who cannot manage money and cannot manage major projects, and we are all paying for it. Victorian taxpayers are paying for it.

But let us not stop at Metro, with all of the problems there, which the government still talks about as a fantastic project, which we are going to have to run slower trains on. A fantastic project to run slower trains? And who knows, when we get 10-car sets, whether they can run through the Metro Tunnel. What a Third World joke from this Premier and from this government.

But let us talk about North East Link, shall we, because North East Link – another flagship project from this government – has also spiralled, from \$16 billion to \$26 billion. We had \$10 billion in the last blowout. Let us just talk about that, because that blowout came out in December. On 10 December we heard there had been another \$10 billion blowout on this project. What happened two days later, after the blowout? Two days later the Premier, being so reckless, went and signed up for the first stage of the Suburban Rail Loop – \$3.6 billion. So here was a government that had just had one of its major flagship projects blow out by another \$10 billion saying, ‘Yep, no worries. We’ve got plenty of dough. Even though we’re in debt \$188 billion’ – a million dollars an hour in interest just to pay that down, or \$26 million a day – ‘it doesn’t matter. Here’s another \$3.6 billion just to sign the first stage of the Suburban Rail Loop, with no business case, no plan. Who knows where we’re going to get the \$11 billion worth of value capture. Who knows where the federal money is going to come from. A \$22 billion black hole for the Suburban Rail Loop, but, you know what, it doesn’t matter. We’ll just sign up Victorians to more uncertainty.’

We know the Suburban Rail Loop has been reckless. We know that this project has not been properly managed. We know global ratings giant Standard & Poor’s has issued a stark warning that if the Allan Labor government presses ahead with the Suburban Rail Loop without securing additional federal funding, Victoria’s credit rating could be slashed, pushing our state into even more financial despair. We know that when the credit rating goes down the interest payments go up, and we know that when the interest payments go up Victorians pay more. It is very, very simple: they pay more.

When you have a disastrous government that could not manage a fete and could not manage a chook raffle – could not manage anything at all – you would not put it in charge of anything. You would put them in a corner and say ‘You know what, just go and play with your calculator and learn some numbers’ because you would not put this lot in charge of anything. It is absolutely unbelievable to think that this government for 10 years has managed the purse strings. They were lucky when we had good money coming in in terms of property investment and development, but they fixed that up really quickly by taxing the bejesus out of people, and everybody said, ‘Good night, Victoria, we’re off. Good night, Victoria. Lights out, we’re off.’

But that is not all. We have a government, as I say, in debt. We have a government with broken promises – promise after promise – when it comes to these projects and all of the money that has been wasted. This is why the backbench are very nervous, because \$216 billion for the project means, ‘What about our fair share?’ What about our fair share for Niddrie? What about our fair share for Melton, for electrifying the Melton line? What about our fair share of the Suburban Rail Loop money in Bendigo? What about that in terms of ambulances? What about Point Cook in terms of another rail line? What about Greenvale in terms of ensuring that Mickleham Road, stage 2, is separated? What about Yan Yean, to ensure that they have the Hazel Glen College delivered? What about Eltham, to ensure that they get a new community hospital? Well, that is not happening because the current member for Eltham is too busy trying to claw back the money that has been taken off her for the Suburban Rail Loop. What about the South-Eastern Region, in Clyde, where the Clyde railway station extension was promised, but never delivered, by Labor in 1999, 2002, 2006 and 2010. What about Monbulk, who wanted vital road safety upgrades for the Mount Dandenong Tourist Road? Again, what about that? That is never going to happen, member for Monbulk, because your Premier is too busy taking the cash and putting it into the Suburban Rail Loop. Member for Monbulk, you can jump up and down. That money is not going to happen. The member for Monbulk’s money will not happen, because Premier Allan has squandered it all on the \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop. And what about Ripon with the Murray Basin rail? That money is never going to happen either, member for Ripon, is it? No.

Daniela DE MARTINO: On a point of order, Speaker, I believe there is an obligation to speak in facts in this chamber.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

David SOUTHWICK: The only fact is that Labor cannot manage money and Victorians are paying the price. We see blowout after blowout. Victorians are hanging their head in absolute despair, thinking to themselves, ‘We’ve got this lot in charge for another two years. We’ve got this lot that’s going to send the state broke. We’ve got this lot that couldn’t manage a chook raffle. We’ve got this lot that doesn’t care. We’ve got this lot that doesn’t know what they’re going to do in terms of going forward.’ Ultimately Victorians, each and every one of them, are paying the price for a reckless government and a reckless Premier who could not manage anything, let alone taxpayer money and the Victorian government.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (16:17): I am not really sure what we just witnessed there. It was a fairly flat contribution. It was a bit *Weekend at Bernie’s* or Mr Bean’s New Year’s Eve party, where he sends the invite out to the whole suburb, two people show up and they change the clock to leave early. It was just an extraordinary, very, very flat sort of contribution. I am pleased to follow on from –

Tim Richardson: That was quite a funny joke.

Josh BULL: Thanks, member for Mordialloc. That is a compliment from you. I am pleased to have the opportunity to follow on from the previous member to speak about this matter of public importance. What we have seen are, of course, no surprises from the one-trick pony, the member for Caulfield. In his contribution, the member for Caulfield spoke about the speed of trains, which is a fair point. Do you know the slowest type of train, member for Mordialloc? A train that does not exist. What we have seen in question time and throughout the course of the last couple of weeks is those opposite at each and every opportunity barrack for failure when it comes to our Big Build. What do we see? Cheap political games, undermining the hard work of the entire team of the Big Build, and barracking for failure.

Those opposite can continue to do that. That is fine by us. They can keep barracking for failure, they can keep losing elections, they can keep losing respect and they can keep sending a message to the Victorian community that there is one side of politics in this great state that is committed to getting things done, that is committed to making sure we are delivering the big projects, the important projects, the projects that change communities and indeed the projects that Victorians vote for.

Granted, those opposite did not have many matters to deal with when it came to Big Build projects. They did not have many matters to deal with because there was nothing on the books. There was nothing to deliver. For four years, member for Monbulk – they were those miserable, lonely years – there were no projects delivered, no jobs created, no communities transformed, no communities changed. And what do we see today, last week and each and every time they come into this place – albeit it is a little bit flat for those opposite today. We of course are focusing on delivering, on making sure we are investing in supporting communities, removing level crossings, delivering the Metro Tunnel and delivering the Suburban Rail Loop. While those opposite can continue to block and stop, we will focus on the projects that Victorians voted for and the projects that our community wholeheartedly have endorsed and supported.

Members on this side of the house and this Allan Labor government know and understand that projects of this size and scale require complex planning, design and investment, and they do cause significant disruption. What we see is a conversation with the community: do you or do you not want to remove a dangerous and congested level crossing to make your community safer? That is wholeheartedly endorsed and supported. We know and understand that that is a significant undertaking. It takes a massive workforce, it takes planning, it takes investment, it takes design and it takes vision. What we see from those opposite is a vision vacuum. There is nothing. It is far easier to undermine, to talk the workforce down and to disrespect local communities.

I did have the opportunity just a couple of weeks ago to head down to the wonderful community that is Croydon for the opening of the Croydon station. There was a bit of excitement and there was a bit of a buzz around town. I think they thought you were coming, member for Mordialloc, rather than me,

but that is okay. What was really pleasing to do on that visit was speak to the local community about what this was going to mean for them. I did also see in a later Facebook post the member for Croydon celebrating the opening of the station. I think that is a good thing. I commend –

A member interjected.

Josh BULL: A good local member indeed; I take up the interjection. But what we see is those opposite walking two sides of the street. They will slap, they will slam and they will criticise our projects, and then they will go out to the community and say, ‘Job done. We did it.’

A member: And that’s the Greens.

Josh BULL: Well, not that bad. We on this side of the house are committed to ensuring that the more than 17,000 Victorians that are directly employed on the Big Build continue to get the skills, the training and the opportunities that they deserve and indeed make our state better and fairer along that journey. For every 100 jobs on the Big Build, there are 200 more supported through the supply chain – at peak construction, 38,000 indirect jobs and 50,000 across the entire economy. That is what those opposite want to stop. We know and understand that the more than 277 million hours that have been worked across the Big Build thus far have not only transformed communities but they have changed and shaped lives. We are a team that is committed to making sure that we deliver those projects at each and every opportunity.

We know projects such as the Metro Tunnel – and I have had the opportunity to be at all five of our brand new stations over recent times – this transformative project with those twin 9-kilometre tunnels and the connection of the Sunbury line to the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines, is a game changer. Just today we saw in question time those opposite taking the time to again try to undermine what is going to be an amazing, transformative project. I will guarantee you that those opposite will indeed be on those trains and will be more than happy to get off those trains at the amazing Parkville precinct and all of the other train stations that we will deliver as part of this project. It is the single biggest investment in the heavy rail network since 1981 – imagine the Victorian community without the city loop.

This is about ensuring that we have a determined vision to get on and get things done. That is the vision of the Premier and the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, who each and every day are supporting that workforce and supporting projects that Victorians voted for. We know, whether it is the Metro Tunnel, whether it is the West Gate Tunnel, whether it is removing level crossings or whether it is delivering the Suburban Rail Loop or the North East Link, we are committed to focusing on those jobs, those communities and each and every positive, and there are many, that these projects bring. Compare and contrast that to what we have just seen. To talk down, to undermine and to find every single opportunity to attack these projects is not just shameful behaviour, it is simply not being a decent Victorian, but I do not know why we are overly surprised about that.

We are getting on and we are delivering these projects. We know that by 2050 Melbourne will be home to more than 9 million people, roughly the size that London is today, and that growth is important in the context of jobs and in the context of homes and in making sure we are delivering to those precincts, those communities that deserve it, transport when and where they need it.

There is also commentary around the ability to work across our country communities, across the regions, and make sure that we are supporting all Victorians. What we know and understand is that these projects also benefit rural and regional Victoria. We know and understand – and I see the member in celebration over on the other side of the house – that it is incredibly important that we support every single Victorian. That is the government we are, and that is the government we will always be.

I want to take the opportunity to again thank and acknowledge the massive team, the huge team, involved in all of these projects, whether it be the Metro or whether it be the West Gate Tunnel. The transformation that is delivered through removing a level crossing is significant and is fundamentally important to local communities. If, Speaker, you were to have a crystal ball and go back 10 years,

which is a significant period of time now, and look at the commitment to removing 50 dangerous and congested level crossings, the first commitment that was made, and the commentary at the time – ‘couldn’t be done’, ‘wouldn’t be done’, ‘shouldn’t be done’ – and fast-forward to four years later, it was those opposite that had the grand policy, which unfortunately was not delivered, of removing I think it was 55 intersections across the state. Of course we know and understand that we took a real, comprehensive, costed and budgeted plan to the people of Victoria that was endorsed.

This is about making sure that we are catering for growth, we are creating new jobs, we are creating new skills and we are setting our city and our state up for generations to come. All members of this house should – and I stress ‘should’ – know and understand the importance of investing in public transport, of working with our workforce and of making sure that we are delivering high-class facilities to communities when and where they need them. Making sure that we are doing this work and having the opportunity to do so is really, really important.

But we are not going to stop. Unfortunately what some will do when they get the chance and the opportunity is go out to the community, spook the community, operate in fear, operate in division and operate in a system of effectively undermining every good project that is within the community, that is being delivered and that is supported.

The Suburban Rail Loop will be a significant and important project for the Victorian community. The Metro Tunnel will open next year – as will the West Gate Tunnel – a critical project that is going to make our community stronger, fairer and better. Those opposite, frankly, need to go back to the party room, and sort out the divisions that they have, which are many and varied – and we are probably going to see a few more of those over the next month, I would have thought, or month and a half. It is going to be a very big finals series. But we are making sure that we are supporting communities and we are delivering on all of these projects.

You have only got to look to our friends up north who just a couple of weeks ago opened a significant metro project. What we saw in New South Wales was an acknowledgement that there is a long period of delivery when it comes to major transport projects and of course they do cause a great deal of disruption. The reflection that I would bring to the house is that what we saw in that set of circumstances was an acknowledgement from both sides of the political spectrum that those projects needed to be delivered, because to not do them would cost a whole lot more. You have got to have an opportunity to deliver these projects, and I think that the vast majority of Victorians would support, and have supported at three elections now, these projects. We are committed to ensuring we are delivering for all Victorians in the removal of level crossings, the delivery of Metro and the delivery of our massive program of road upgrades.

We will ensure that at every opportunity we are working closely with and listening to Victorians and we are making sure that they know and understand that with that investment – whether it be in transport, whether it be in housing, whether it be in a whole range of services that we can provide – we will listen, we will act and we will make the hard decisions when and where we need to, as opposed to blocking, stopping, playing cheap political games or coming in here and delivering what is just theatre. Out there in the community, relieving congestion and improving safety are what matter to people. Getting people home safer, sooner and in a better and fairer way is what this government is committed to. We will ensure that we are always listening to make sure that we are putting people first, and we will always deliver for the people of this great state.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:31): I am very pleased to rise and support the matter of public importance submitted by the member for Caulfield. I want to support the member for Sunbury because I am indebted to him for enlightening the chamber on how much the government's Big Build program is delivering for rural and regional Victoria. In Casterton they are ecstatic about the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL). In Orbost they are just waiting for the North East Link to be finished. In Mildura they are excited about the Metro Tunnel and the blowout up there. In Shepparton they cannot wait to see the West Gate Tunnel open because that is going to make a big difference to their lives as well.

We get the member for Sunbury and the Premier saying the Suburban Rail Loop will be great for all Victorians. Like I said, in Cavendish they are waiting every morning for the newspaper delivery to come. They are standing outside waiting to find out the update on the Suburban Rail Loop because it is going to make a big difference in Cavendish and in Portland and in all those areas.

They are seeing this \$40 billion blowout on the Big Build, and in the meantime those of us in rural and regional Victoria are driving around on goat tracks because our roads are absolutely appalling because of the management of this government. Every time there is a blowout on a major project in Melbourne, what happens? The government finds the money for it. But when we raised concerns about our local roads in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last year, the department said it had not met its targets on upgrading local roads because there had been a 'unit cost increase' in the cost of doing the roads. Did the government put any extra money in to make sure that we actually met the targets and fixed our roads? No. There was nothing for rural and regional Victoria to fix our major roads, but if there is a \$10 billion blowout on the North East Link, 'No worries, Tim, I will just sign another cheque.' What was it, \$888 million, member for Caulfield, on the Metro Tunnel? Oh yeah, we will sign up for that because we want it open in time for the election, so we will put in an extra billion dollars – no problem at all. Rural and regional Victorians are absolutely not buying this spin from the government about the Big Build because they are not seeing any benefit.

I could go through some of the projects that are not happening. The member for Ripon would like to talk about, I am sure, the Western Highway duplication at Buangor. She might say and the government might say, quite rightly, that there are reasons for that, but perhaps they could explain why the Ararat to Stawell section is not happening. The government's Big Build website states that the planning was completed in 2013. What year are we in now? 2024, 11 years down the track and it has not progressed. Likewise the Kilmore bypass and the Traralgon bypass, member for Morwell. I think I was about 12 when the first stage of the Traralgon bypass was planned. I am 50 now and it still has not progressed. What is happening with the Yarrowonga–Mulwala bridge, member for Ovens Valley? Built in 1939, it will probably be another hundred years before that gets done too, the way we are going. The Swan Hill bridge, likewise. The north-west rail, the Murray Basin rail project – the government likes to talk about what it does for rail and what the opposition did on rail. Well, that is again a monumental catastrophe of management. And guess who was in charge of the Murray Basin rail? The Premier today. It is another one that the Premier has touched and just messed up. And that is just on transport infrastructure.

I would like to touch on a couple of things that are of small relevance in a statewide sense but really important. The bushfires occurred over the new year period in 2019–20, yet the member for Gippsland East will tell you that for some of the rebuilding projects from the bushfires, like the Thurra River bridge and the Cape Conran cabins, it is five years that we have been waiting for the government to rebuild those facilities in East Gippsland. It is taking five years to actually deliver something. The Thurra River bridge, taking you to the Croajingolong campgrounds at Thurra River, is very important for a place like Cann River – a place that has lost much of its economic base in the last 10 years because the Labor government shut down the timber industry. So what has the government done? 'Oh yeah, we're going to step in and look after Thurra River and Cann River. No, no, we are going on the go-slow there. We'll get to it when we feel like it.' The words of the then Premier saying to the member for Gippsland East that we will walk beside you in this recovery ring pretty hollow when you hear that sort of outcome. You can go through plenty of them. Sealers Cove walk at Wilsons Prom in my electorate – damaged in 2021. It will be 2025 before they are going to fix it, if you are lucky. We are seeing time and time again throughout this state where regional Victoria misses out.

A couple of years ago I asked the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) to look at the infrastructure investment of city versus country. It was bad enough when you include the Commonwealth government contributions, but knowing, as I do and as my colleagues do, that the federal coalition government had put a lot of money into regional projects –

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: I am talking about regional – like the Regional Rail Revival, which the current Premier likes to talk about a lot, yet it was actually the federal coalition government that funded most of it. Notwithstanding the new federal Labor government is now having to kick up another \$300 million for the Gippsland line, and we still have not got the Bunyip River bridge done. We still have got Longwarry train station with a platform but no rail. Is that the case?

Wayne Farnham: Correct.

Danny O'BRIEN: This is just the state of things. Anyway, I asked the PBO to do an assessment of infrastructure spending, and he found, when you took out the Australian government contributions – this is the 2021–22 budget, mind you; this is before we had a \$10 billion blowout on the North East Link and before we had the blowouts on the Suburban Rail Loop – that there were projects in the metropolitan area of \$79 billion and projects in regional areas of \$11 billion. I want to put that in context. That is asset investment per person in the metropolitan region of \$15,000; in regional areas it is \$7000. You do not hear the member for Ripon, the member for Wendouree, the member for Eureka and the member for Macedon complaining. The member for – well, you are not really regional, Yan Yean, sorry. Maybe the member for Lara might actually speak up. Where are the government regional members? I would not include you in that, Speaker, in deference of course. Where are they speaking up?

The figure I have just given per person in metropolitan Victoria shows 114 per cent more infrastructure investment than for someone in regional Victoria. As I said, that is before the \$10 billion blowout on the North East Link. Imagine what those figures would be now. It is an absolute disgrace that the government is wasting this money – \$40 billion of blowouts on these projects – and yet we are still waiting for things. We are waiting in my electorate for investment in Sale College and in Foster Primary School. We are waiting for a new stadium at Mirboo North primary and secondary schools. We are wanting kamikaze corner in Leongatha to be fixed up. The Minister for Roads and Road Safety is at the table. Maybe she could listen to that one and fix that too. We are waiting for erosion at Loch Sport to be finished before it wipes away houses because the government has done nothing for seven years. Yet at the same time we have \$188 billion of debt and regional Victorians who are missing out on all of this investment are getting nothing, and now we are being asked to pay for that debt. We have got the increases in land tax. We have got the increases in payroll tax. We have got the schools payroll tax if you happen to send your kids to a private school. We have got the vacant residential land tax. We have got the windfall gains tax. And as of yesterday, now we have the Airbnb tax, of which 50 per cent of those Airbnbs are in regional Victoria. So we get nothing but we have got to pay extra for it and our kids are going to be saddled with \$188 billion in debt.

The SRL in particular – I mean, I have been on the record in this place before saying that this in theory is a good project, the idea of having an orbital loop. In theory it is a good project. In principle it is good. In principle it is also good that I have a private island in the South Pacific, but I cannot afford that and neither can this state. This is a project that does not stack up. The federal government is showing that it does not stack up, and if this project goes ahead under this government regional Victoria will suffer again for decades at a time as it sucks investment away from us. We have got goat tracks for roads at the moment. That is only going to continue if this government continues with this project program.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (16:42): The Nationals should be the lead coalition partner, but there is no justice in this world. When we were emailed this matter of public importance yesterday late afternoon, I was really, really happy to have the opportunity to speak on it because I will always relish the opportunity to talk about Labor's infrastructure agenda, the same infrastructure agenda that, as we speak, is directly employing more than 17,000 Victorians. Every time they pursue this decade-old campaign against Labor's Big Build, they are saying to those Victorians that they should be out of a job.

I sat through the member for Caulfield's appalling contribution. We know that the member for Caulfield has always had a dubious relationship with the truth, and I was absolutely staggered the other day when he started tweeting about Pinocchio, referring to other people as Pinocchio and trying to claim that they had a problem with the truth. This is the same member for Caulfield who literally pretended to be a professor. This is the same member for Caulfield –

Brad Rowswell interjected.

Nick STAIKOS: I will come to you in a moment, member for Sandringham.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, accusations such as are being made by the member for Bentleigh can only be made by substantive motion. The member for Caulfield is not even in the chamber. It is a pretty low act. I would ask you to pull up the member for Bentleigh.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bentleigh, I ask you not to reflect on other members in the chamber.

Nick STAIKOS: It was widely reported in the papers and the member for Caulfield admitted to it, but I digress. The Liberals always oppose infrastructure. We have seen that over the 10 years that this government has been in power. They oppose level crossing removals. Even before we were in government, the then Premier Denis Naphthine said that it was not possible to remove 50 level crossings over eight years. Well, here we are, we have removed 84 level crossings. That was not even the worst thing that Denis Naphthine said. On the Metro Tunnel, this is what Denis Naphthine said before we were even in government:

Having a massive hole dividing Melbourne would be worse than the Berlin Wall ...

It would be absolutely detrimental to the operation of Melbourne ...

In other words, building the Metro Tunnel would be worse than the Berlin Wall. This is what the former Premier said, but here we are 10 years later about to open the Metro Tunnel. We are about to open the Metro Tunnel, and it is a transformational project because the difference between those of us on this side of the house and those on that side of the house is that those of us in this government are ambitious for Melbourne. We see Melbourne as one of the great cities of the world. We are all well-travelled people. Go to New York, go to Tokyo, go to London – equally great global cities but with far superior public transport systems. We are changing that. I know they are well travelled as well; they in particular like to enjoy their travel allowances. They go overseas and they see the rail systems that exist in these great global cities. So I question: why do they not want the same for Melbourne? Why do they not want the same for a city that by the end of this decade is going to overtake Sydney as Australia's most populous capital city or a city that by the 2050s is going to be the size that London is today? The trouble with the Liberal Party is they show no ambition for this state. When they try to enter the infrastructure debate, they do rubbish like we saw during the 2018 election campaign, when the former and probably future leader, the member for Bulleen, promised intersection removals. Do we remember the intersection removals?

A member interjected.

Nick STAIKOS: That is right. We were going to have all these off-ramps and on-ramps and flyovers. It lasted one day. It was a \$5 billion announcement. After they made it, they were so embarrassed by it that it literally just died on its bum. This is how they treat infrastructure.

I have got to say, we need the Suburban Rail Loop. There is a long list of reasons why a city like Melbourne needs the Suburban Rail Loop. One is that it will connect our rail system to universities, to TAFEs and to health precincts. Let us play a little game. The game is called 'Which Liberal Premier didn't oppose infrastructure?'

A member: Which one?

Nick STAIKOS: Henry Bolte, because Henry Bolte in 1969 released the Melbourne transportation plan. And what was in that plan? A rail line to Monash University. In fact do you know what else?

What are the three largest universities in Australia? I looked this up just earlier today. The three largest universities in Australia, from the top: Monash University, the University of Melbourne and RMIT. For all three the Allan Labor government is putting a train station at their door, because we believe that these large universities and these large health precincts need to have proper public transport connections.

Do you know what else? As for Suburban Rail Loop East, the Monash national employment and innovation cluster is the largest jobs hub outside of the CBD. Currently it has approximately 75,000 jobs, and it is projected by the 2050s to have an additional 162,000 jobs. That is because that hub is home to Monash University, Monash Medical Centre, Monash Children's Hospital, Monash heart hospital, the Australian Synchrotron, the Melbourne Centre for Nanofabrication, and Moderna. I know they do not all support vaccines on that side, but Moderna is in that hub thanks to this government. But those opposite do not believe that by the 2050s or by the 2030s – when it is already a jobs hub, the largest job hubs out of the CBD, and it is going to get exponentially larger by the time the Suburban Rail Loop is over – that precinct will require any public transport.

I think one of the most egregious things I have seen relating to their opposition to the Suburban Rail Loop lately concerns the member for Sandringham. The member for Sandringham and I share something in common. We are both millennials – only just, but we are both technically millennials. I think millennials started sometime in the early 1980s. The other thing we share in common is we both grew up in our electorates. Our electorates are neighbouring. In fact if you stand in the middle of Southland shopping centre, you are in two places at once because we have half of that shopping centre each. The other thing we have in common is that we still live in our electorates. And you know what we need to do, and the Premier said this during question time: we need to give other millennials, other young people, the opportunity to live where they were raised, to live where they grew up. But the member for Sandringham is out in his electorate running a scare campaign against the development that will follow the Suburban Rail Loop. I ask the member for Sandringham: if you cannot have higher density housing so people can have somewhere to live on an old gas worksite on the Nepean Highway, adjacent to the Frankston railway line, adjacent to the Suburban Rail Loop, between two industrial precincts 15 kilometres from the CBD and next to a major shopping centre, where can you build it? This is dirty, ugly politics.

He has not stopped there – he has gone around on this scare campaign, saying that we are going to take away 50 per cent of Sir William Fry Reserve and we have no plans to replace that open space. We have said time and time again we will replace every square inch of the open space at Sir William Fry Reserve. These are scare campaigns, because they have got nothing else. I get it – we are all politicians. This is an easy way to whip up a scare campaign. I understand he has got a public meeting scheduled soon where no doubt he will be sprouting more untruths.

But, do you know what, some things are actually bigger than politics. We have a housing crisis, and the SRL is not just a transport plan, it is a housing plan. We want 70,000 additional homes along the entire alignment of the Suburban Rail Loop East, because unlike those opposite we are ambitious about this state, we are ambitious about Melbourne and we are looking to the 2050s. We are looking to what Melbourne is going to look like in the 2050s, because in 30 years time, if we do not do any of this, the future generation will not thank us.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (16:51): I also rise to address the matter of public importance submitted by the member for Caulfield relating to Labor's Big Build, relating to CFMEU-driven cost blowouts and relating to the impact of the Suburban Rail Loop on our economy and our community. Where did the member for Bentleigh go? He has gone. He had a few things to say about me, so it is disappointing that he is not here in the chamber to hear the return serve. The thing is that what I am doing in my community is listening to my community and what I am doing is hearing my community when it comes to the Suburban Rail Loop. Those on the government side of the chamber will say time and time again, 'We didn't just take the Suburban Rail Loop to one election, we took it to two elections, and that gives us the mandate to deliver the Suburban Rail Loop.' I will tell you that the truth of that

in my community is this: the majority of my community did not vote for the Suburban Rail Loop. In fact they voted for me – not once, in 2018, but twice, again in 2022. In the intervening period between 2018 and 2022 I increased my margin by about 5.5 per cent, such is the disdain for Labor's Suburban Rail Loop in my community.

It is untrue to say that everything was known about Labor's Suburban Rail Loop before the 2020 election. In fact it is only after the 2022 election that we are actually understanding the truth of Labor's Suburban Rail Loop – 18-storey, high-density, high-rise towers in my community next to one- and two-storey suburban lots. That is unacceptable. My community did not vote for that. My community did not vote for 6000 cubic metres of category A toxic waste to be removed from the Sir William Fry Reserve, which is what needs to be done before Joan the boring machine arrives onsite to start building these tunnels to wherever they are going. My community did not vote for the government to remove more than 50 per cent of Sir William Fry Reserve. Sir William Fry Reserve is a much-loved passive recreational space in my community. Yes, the government has said that it plans to replace it metre for metre, but where and when? Those details are sadly lacking. These are the things that my community did not vote for, these are the things that Victorians did not vote for and these are the things that Victorians – certainly Victorians in my community – need to be informed about. That is why next Thursday night I will be holding a community forum on these matters: to inform my community, to engage with my community, to hear my community and to come back to this place and convey to the government the truth of this project and the impact of it on my community.

Set all of that aside just for one minute. Let us talk about the economics of this. The government, the Premier as recently as today in question time, would not confirm that the expected amount for the Suburban Rail Loop of, what is it, \$34.5 billion will in fact stay. Given the history of this government over the last 10 years – 10 years of Labor and 10 Labor budgets – chances are, if you look at history, it will be another Labor government blowout and Victorians will pay the price. I have a very firm view on these matters. At this point in our history we are in the middle of a hospital and health crisis. When education standards in this state are flatlining if not declining, we have got 30 per cent of students in grade 3 who cannot count to 20 after 10 years of Labor. That is the circumstance in this state. We have got a health and hospital crisis, we have got an education crisis and we have got a housing crisis, and this government are so darned set, so bloody-minded on delivering this vanity SRL project that they have forgotten people. They have forgotten the Victorian people. This is what happens after 10 years of being in government. This is not a partisan comment. This is what happens after 10 years of being in government – hubris sets in. They stop listening to the people who have given them the great privilege of being there and serving the state in the first place.

The SRL is friendless. Whether it is the Grattan Institute, whether it is RMIT's Professor Michael Buxton or whether it is the Rail Futures Institute, the SRL is absolutely and utterly friendless, and it is about time this Labor government read the tea leaves and read the Labor pollster's publication. Who was it? Old mate Kos was out there saying the SRL is friendless. Fair dinkum, read the tea leaves, get with the program, because we simply cannot afford it and we should be prioritising the Victorian people over vanity projects. Every day ending in 'Y' this Labor government simply do not get it.

Just yesterday the ABS released its latest business figures in Victoria. Do you know how many businesses have closed down or have left this state in the last 12 months?

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: Thank you very much, member for Narracan – top prize for you. 152,000 businesses have closed down in this state or left this state in the last 12 months. At this point in our history we have got the highest debt in the country, the highest unemployment in the country, the lowest wage growth in the country and the highest inflation in the country. This is a government that is so darned set on creating their Big Build, which will in fact end up being Victorians' big bill. It is a Labor government that Victorians simply cannot afford.

On the Metro Tunnel, just yesterday it was revealed there would be \$888 million on top of the already \$3.36 billion total cost blowout on that project. Where is that money coming from? Just last sitting week, a couple of weeks ago, it was revealed that this government plan to pour \$1.5 billion into health. They first claimed that there were no health cuts. They swore black and blue there have been no health cuts – ‘record funding for health’ – and yet they come around and they say, ‘No, no, no. \$1.5 billion of additional money for health.’ But where is that coming from? The Treasurer was out there at the doors of this place and he said, ‘No, no, we will not be increasing our debt.’ So if you are not increasing your debt, how do you pay the \$1.5 billion? Here are your two options: you cut services or projects, or you raise taxes. They are the only two other ways of increasing revenue. Whether it is the \$1.5 billion two weeks ago or the \$888 million, close to \$1 billion, just yesterday, Labor cannot manage money and they cannot manage projects, and Victorians, day after day, week after week, year after year, are paying the price.

The thing that keeps me up at night is this: there are still two and a bit years until the next election. I am generally an optimistic person, I am generally a hopeful person, but I hate to say it: for the next two years Victorians should be on notice, because if you look to the last 10 years of the economic destruction that has wreaked havoc on this state at the hands of Premier Andrews and now Premier Allan, I think it is fair to say that Victorians should expect more.

If you want to know what people are going to do in the future, look to what they have done in the past: 55 new or increased taxes, and half of those on the property sector. With a new build in this state at the minute, on a greenfield site anywhere between 30 to 45 per cent of that new build is government taxes, fees or charges, and this government wonders why we are in the middle of a housing crisis. The cost of building a new place on a greenfield site is going through the roof thanks to the taxes that this Labor government has handed down over the last 10 years – more than \$40 billion on project cost overruns, on blowouts on major projects, alone in the last decade. It was the Masters Builders Association who actually had the gumption to put a figure on that, saying that around 30 per cent of cost blowouts are attributed to union involvement in this state. That is the state of things after 10 years of Labor, after 10 Labor budgets.

Victorians continue to pay the price. I say to those Victorians who may very well hear this contribution at some point in the future: there is a better way; there must be a better way. I say to Victorian businesses: it will not always be like this; Labor will not always be in charge. There is a new government coming – a new government that promises hope, that promises aspiration, that will get out of your way, that will roll out more red carpet and less red tape and that will incentivise Victorian businesses to create wealth and to create opportunity. That is what we offer. In November 2026 Victorians will have a choice, after 10 years of Labor – it will be 12 years at that point. Fair dinkum, Victoria is sick of this lot. There is a better way, and it is coming.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (17:02): I am absolutely delighted to rise today to speak on this matter of public importance on the Allan Labor government’s Big Build. I am proud to be a member of this government because on this side of the house we understand the importance of investing in the future of our state – investing in projects that drive our economy, create jobs and provide the vital services and infrastructure that this state needs. It is not for the first time recently that the opposition should be thanked for an MPI topic. Today’s once again misses the mark on delivering a perceived blow against the Allan Labor government. What this MPI topic actually does is give us on this side of the house an opportunity to praise the many – because there are many – projects and ways in which our government supports Victorians through investment in public infrastructure. But I guess that is not surprising, because when all you do with the gift of government is cut, it shows that you do not understand the important role that major projects have in our state’s growth and economy.

Our state is growing rapidly. In 2050 it is predicted Melbourne will be home to around 9 million people and Victoria will grow to 11 million. It is expected that Geelong will grow to 500,000 residents, and that is a massive growth considering our current population is just shy of 300,000 people. Planning for this growth is needed right now, and we cannot afford to leave it too late. As a member of this house

that represents the Geelong community, I know that the constituents of the Lara electorate do understand this and can see the benefits of this government's Big Build projects. They can see how these projects are building the infrastructure that is needed now and to futureproof our state. The Big Build is not just about infrastructure delivery; there are 17,000 Victorians directly employed in Victoria's Big Build. For every 100 jobs the Big Build creates, it supports an additional 200 jobs through the supply chains. Our projects have a positive impact on both direct and indirect employment, making a valuable investment for our community.

I had a great weekend. I spent a lot of time with my dog Blue. We got out to the park for some lovely walks in the beautiful Geelong sunshine. On Saturday night I joined many of my colleagues – some from this side, some from the other side – at the Premier's multicultural gala with the Premier and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. It was a fantastic evening. We had about 450 people. The member for Caulfield was there; he had a fantastic evening. The member for Point Cook also had an excellent time. We celebrated Victoria's multicultural communities, with about 450 people attending. For the first time this government brought it to the regions.

On Sunday morning I joined the hardworking members for Geelong and Bellarine, the Minister for Regional Development, the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and of course the Premier at the South Geelong train station to celebrate the completion of the South Geelong to Waurn Ponds rail duplication, a project funded by the Allan Labor government. This is a massive project that would never have been completed under those opposite, because at every opportunity when in government they failed to invest in these big projects that regional Victorians need.

This project is part of the Australian and Victorian governments' more than \$1 billion investment into the staged upgrade of the Geelong line. Works have included removal of level crossings at Fyans Street and Surf Coast Highway and the construction of elevated rail bridges. I cannot tell you how excited people are in Geelong about these level crossing removals. It is the first time we have had them in Geelong. For years we have seen the benefits of the Level Crossing Removal Project across metropolitan Melbourne, and these are just fantastic investments in our community.

We have upgraded the South Geelong and Marshall stations with improved facilities and accessibility. This includes new station buildings. There is an overpass at South Geelong now – I never thought I would see that happen. There are forecourts and second platforms, more shelter and better wayfinding; 8 kilometres of track duplication in sections from South Geelong Station to Breakwater Road and from Marshalltown Road to Waurn Ponds station; more than 5 kilometres of new walking and cycling paths, linking existing trails and paths – this will create a continuous connection between South Geelong and Waurn Ponds; and signalling upgrades, new green open spaces and urban design improvements

This is such a massive project for the Geelong community, and the removal of these level crossings will reduce congestion for thousands of drivers each day. I have been down the Surf Coast Highway. It is so quick now; it is absolutely fantastic. The duplication works will go a long way in making it easier for trains to pass each other, which will improve reliability and reduce unexpected delays. This project also opens the door to additional services between Marshall and Waurn Ponds being added in the future. Construction teams have worked around the clock on a 72-day blitz, and I thank them so much for all of their hard work in delivering this project. The excitement in the community was palpable on Monday morning when trains were back on the Geelong and Warrnambool lines.

Another fantastic project from the Allan Labor government's Big Build is the regional rail revival – something we are so proud of and all of our regional MPs are so proud of – upgrading every single regional passenger line in Victoria. This program is funded by a \$4 billion investment from the state government and the Commonwealth government. Through this project we will see the delivery of more frequent and reliable services while creating 3000 jobs and supplier opportunities in regional Victoria. So far, five of the 10 projects have been completed as part of this revival. The projects include 200 new and extended services across the Ararat, Ballarat, Echuca, Shepparton, Warrnambool and Geelong lines; 14 completed station upgrades, including the two we have just opened at South Geelong

and Marshall; four brand new stations; VLocity trains travelling on these lines for the first time ever; new stabling facilities being completed in Geelong, Ballarat and Shepparton; 316 kilometres of new and upgraded track across Victoria, including that beautiful 8 kilometres we have just opened in Geelong; more than 114 level crossings upgraded; and more than a thousand new and upgraded car parks, including upgrades of car parks at North Geelong and North Shore stations in the electorate of Lara. And there are still many more projects underway.

Despite the sanctimonious claims of those opposite, the vast majority of our projects are delivered on budget and on time, with many delivered ahead of schedule. This is at a time when we are seeing major projects right across the country and indeed worldwide facing unprecedented challenges, workforce shortages and supply challenges. We are seeing increased costs of materials and labour and workforce shortages pushing up the costs of things around the state, and yet this government is still delivering on major transport infrastructure upgrades.

We are not only building big in road and rail, but we are also helping to build thousands of new homes. Our \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build is making sure more Victorians have a roof over their heads, with 9200 homes already under construction or completed. In Geelong this means there are 146 new projects totalling over \$200 million in housing value. There have been 341 homes already completed, with another 222 on the way. This investment in Geelong has created over 1800 jobs.

Transport infrastructure across Victoria has greatly benefited from the Allan Labor government's substantial investment of over \$100 billion. With the population projected to reach 11 million people by the 2050s, the ongoing development of rail and road projects is essential for keeping people moving and promoting a more sustainable and enjoyable living environment. Our government's infrastructure investment will offer increased housing options for residents and address the growing public transportation and suitable housing locations. The alternative, and what those opposite are suggesting, is that we cancel and pause these projects that Victorians have overwhelmingly voted for many times now. This would mean sacking 17,000 workers and cancelling 50,000 jobs, so my question to the opposition is: who are you going to sack first? We know that we need these projects in our state. That is what we are getting on and building. I note that the motion is concerned about the future of our state. Under Labor, Victoria is thriving. The real threat to the future of our state is the Liberal opposition.

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (17:10): I rise to speak on this matter of public importance submitted by the member for Caulfield:

That this house recognises –

quoting from Nick McKenzie's CFMEU exposé –

that 'the Big Build ... is absolutely rotten' ... and condemns the Allan Labor government for:

- (1) the disastrous CFMEU-driven cost blowouts exceeding \$40 billion across major projects ... and
- (2) the wasteful \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop, which is pushing Victoria's debt to \$187.8 billion by 2027 ...

This Labor government has been in power for 21 of the last 25 years and for the last 10 years in a row. Other than governing interactions between people to prevent injustice and ensuring a just and fair society, any government must do three things. It must maximise freedom, opportunity and hope. It must maximise freedom for people to live their lives and express their views insofar as it is possible. It must create equality of opportunity so people are not disadvantaged by where they live or the circumstances of their upbringing. It must enable hope so people can aspire to achieve their dreams and be rewarded for their effort. But if we look at the results under this Labor government, the opposite has happened. People have less freedom, less opportunity and less hope.

A blatant example has been this Labor government's total mismanagement of the state infrastructure agenda, particularly the Big Build – or, as the member for Sandringham called it, the big bill. Premier Allan has overseen the rot that has infected Victoria's infrastructure projects, with Nick McKenzie and others laying bare incompetence and corruption, particularly as they pertain to Labor's CFMEU

alliance. When taxpayers give up their hard-earned money to government, they expect government to manage that money wisely. Instead we have seen CFMEU-driven cost blowouts exceeding \$40 billion across major projects and a white elephant \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop.

Since December last year road and rail projects have blown out by an eye-watering over \$12 billion, costing taxpayers an extra \$83 million each and every day. We have the West Gate Tunnel, three years late and more than \$4 billion over budget, bogged down by a toxic soil crisis, cost overruns and legal troubles. We have the Metro Tunnel, blown out from about \$11 billion to at least \$14 billion, with another \$888 million in secret top-up payments negotiated by the Allan Labor government. The rail line to Melbourne Airport has also been delayed, on ice for four years and facing a \$3 billion shortfall. Meanwhile the North East Link has blown out by more than \$10 billion and is now estimated to cost over \$26 billion. Despite Labor announcing the total cost of the Suburban Rail Loop in 2018 to be around \$50 billion, with no real business case, it has blown out now to more than four times that amount. These are not just abstract numbers that mean nothing. This is the blood, sweat and tears of hardworking Victorians. As per a quote used by Annika Smethurst in a recent article, it has been 'over budget, over time, under benefits, over and over again' with every project. Victorians continue to pay the price of Labor's major project mismanagement.

It is not just major projects; there are also many other overrun projects. I was really involved in fighting for traders and employees in and off Young Street in Frankston from 2017 onwards. With the state Labor government's Young Street upgrades, they put up with delay after delay after delay for nearly a year with seemingly no consequences for delays and increased project costs. This meant cars could not park near the shops and it totally reduced foot traffic over, from memory, two Christmas trading periods. Even my wife's relatives in South Korea were shocked at how long this supposedly simple project was taking. It meant many traders were struggling to survive. Many had to cull employees and lost profits, with one saying she took just \$2 in one day and went out of business. One suicided. It was so bad that then councillor Steve Toms was booted out of the Labor Party after doing the right thing by standing up for traders. I wrote to now Premier Allan in 2017 and raised it in Parliament at the time, calling for her intervention to assist traders impacted by the delays – traders like Don's Custom Leatherworks, Fine Touch Hair and Beauty, Lucky's, Tony's Local Cash Trader, Eliza Doolittle and more. I got no response from the now Premier, and I still have had no response.

Taxpayers and people like this, calling for justice, continue to be betrayed by a government who throw around taxpayer dollars like Monopoly money. That is taxpayer money – I repeat, taxpayer money – wasted. That is mums and dads, hardworking income earners, students, apprentices, small business owners, traders and employees. It is people struggling with massive cost-of-living pressures – people who are often living pay cheque to pay cheque, increasingly accessing food banks; who cannot get into housing; who are struggling to pay the rent or the mortgage or loans; who are on the ever-increasing public housing waitlist; who are homeless or about to be; who pay taxes and give up their hard-earned cash; who spend time away from children, working day and night or in second jobs, paying their taxes to this Labor government – a Labor government who have just wasted it, as if it was Labor's money to waste, not the money of the Victorian people.

Labor have wasted it to the point of now approaching a \$188 billion debt and a \$26 million a day taxpayer-funded interest bill. This waste has meant Labor increasing taxes across the board to try to tax their way out of debt, which we know does not work. It has meant more land tax, affecting rental providers and renters and reducing rental stock; more payroll taxes, affecting small business owners and employees; more schools tax, affecting parents making sacrifices to give their kids the best education; and now a holiday and tourism tax that will impact people holidaying with their family who might need short stays between accommodation or who are offering a home or a room. It has meant more cuts to services and other infrastructure. First were services that the public might not have noticed as much, such as prisons and corrections, but which do have a longer-term impact on crime and recidivism. Then there has been cutting off or delaying investment in rail and buses, often to places that do not have any public transport, particularly trains, such as in my electorate of Mornington, which

has no rail services altogether, and such as with projects like the Frankston to Baxter rail line or retirement villages in Mornington with bus shelters but no buses.

Increasingly there are more cuts to what is normally advertised as Labor's bread and butter – education and health – doing things like cost-shifting to councils, which we hear those like the Mornington Peninsula shire constantly talking about as well. It has meant a lack of investment in what is needed – public housing and crisis accommodation. Instead we have a housing crisis, with rental providers pulling out, meaning less rental stock, higher rents and homelessness at record levels. For example, on the peninsula net public housing has gone backwards under Labor over the last 10 years. Up to 30 per cent of such homes are in disrepair and vacant. We have one crisis accommodation service that could close at any time, and the peninsula is now reported to face the fourth highest level of homelessness in the state. This is despite Labor's rhetoric and despite the fact that public housing and crisis accommodation are the responsibility of the state government.

It has meant, as I said, interest payments on debt approaching \$26 million a day. That is a school redevelopment every single day that could go to many public schools with crumbling 50-year-old infrastructure that is falling apart, like Mount Eliza Secondary. It has meant a Labor government that is scrambling and getting more and more out of touch with the community, ignoring the cries of the community whether on increasing crime rates or people in extremely dodgy apartment buildings, like Culcairn Drive in Frankston, who after several years of struggle cannot go on much longer and need a bailout. These are people that this state Labor government have ignored despite their vulnerability. If you do not listen to people in need, if you do not listen to those who are struggling, if you do not listen to our most vulnerable and if you do not hear the cries of those who are yelling 'injustice', you do not deserve to be an MP, and you do not deserve to be in government.

What this all says to me is that we have a government that is increasingly tired and out of touch, failing to come up with new ideas, failing to listen to people, not listening to common sense and being increasingly wasteful with taxpayer funds belonging to the Victorian people. This all says to me that it is time for renewal, not just for our state but for the future of the people of Victoria – time for renewal when by November 2026 this government will have been in power for 23 of the last 27 years. It is time for a Liberal and Nationals government – a government that will lower and reduce red tape and taxes to bring in economic growth and new revenue to Victoria; that will cap, manage and pay down debt; that will focus on strategic infrastructure investment to grow and attract industry, create jobs, increase opportunities and support families; that will increase freedoms trampled on by Labor, particularly during COVID; that will bring in the Government Construction Projects Integrity Bill 2024 to block thugs from our construction sites; that will establish construction enforcement Victoria to have real teeth to enforce a reinstated building industry code of practice that will tackle crime and bring consequences to those who reoffend; that will invest in our future for kids and education; and that will bring freedom, opportunity and hope.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (17:21): I was a bit confused; I thought I had come into the wrong room. I thought this was a matter of public importance (MPI), but I am just hearing these sales pitches for a faulty, defective product that I do not want and I do not think many other people want either. Acting Speaker Edbrooke, I am really glad it is you in the chair actually because I want to share with you a really interesting fact, and that is about hot air ballooning. It was 241 years ago yesterday that the first hydrogen-filled balloon took flight. It took off in Paris. It was filled with hot hydrogen. It reached 550 metres. It floated 24 kilometres and landed in the village of Gonesse, where the villagers promptly took pitchforks and knives and destroyed it. They destroyed this floating machine that had landed in their village.

I really reflect on that because it just reminds me so much of those opposite. Why were the villagers so agitated to see this? They did not understand it. They did not understand this new technology, this new mode of transport, and became very agitated and began to attack, and it just sounds like those opposite. They do not understand big projects. They do not understand building infrastructure. They are confused. They see the Metro Tunnel opening coming towards them, and they are scared. They do

not know what that is. They do not know how it was made – they would not even know how to make one – and they are freaking out, so they are attacking and they are destroying.

A member interjected.

Lauren KATHAGE: That is their usual way, that is right. Bring out the pitchforks. So that was 241 years ago yesterday. And after the villagers attacked and destroyed the hot air balloon, what do you think happened the next day in Gonesse? Nothing. Nothing happened in the village, because they had destroyed progress through their fear, their misinformation –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I do not mind a yarn, I do not mind a story, I do not mind a history lesson, but on relevance I would ask you to draw the speaker back to the evidently sensible matter of public importance submitted by the member for Caulfield.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): I have a lot of faith in the member for Yan Yean and her journey back to the MPI.

Lauren KATHAGE: That quiet day, with nothing happening and no public transport in Gonesse, was very different to what happened in Mernda, which is also celebrating an anniversary – in fact on Monday last it was six years since Labor extended the rail line to Mernda. Coming towards Mernda was a new rail line, and were the villagers scared? No, the people of Mernda were very happy. They were very happy. They rejoiced. And in fact over 100 villagers, member for Sunbury, came to the Mernda train station before dawn for the first service. The first train to roll out of that station had 100 excited locals on it. I encourage those opposite to be like the people of Mernda and less like the people of Gonesse and welcome these new infrastructure projects.

I would now like to speak a bit more about that Mernda rail project, which I hasten to add was delivered six months ahead of schedule. The Premier, then Minister for Transport Infrastructure, when speaking about Mernda rail said:

Why can we extend the rail line to Mernda? Because the previous Labor government extended the rail line to South Morang. That is why we can do this ...

because we continue each term of government to work, to build, to extend, to grow, to make better, to make easier, and that is what we continue to do. The last time that South Morang had a functioning railway line it was called the rail motor stopping place 39, and it was a bush stop on the way to Whittlesea, until as a Labor project it was delivered in 2012 – that is right, 2012. It was during the term of those opposite but conceived and funded by our government. Big credit goes to Danielle Green, a local as well, who I will get to. The then public transport minister Terry Mulder, who those opposite might recall, at the opening of this project annoyed local residents –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, we do not mind a history lesson but the member on her feet has not mentioned Big Build, CFMEU-driven cost blowouts and the Suburban Rail Loop in her contribution to date, and she is more than halfway through.

Lauren KATHAGE: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I am giving examples of projects delivered by the government ahead of schedule and on budget to demonstrate how the MPI topic is incorrect.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): I will rule on the point of order. I believe that the member is setting enough context for an MPI, which is a wideranging debate, but I will keep an eye on proceedings.

Lauren KATHAGE: Locals were annoyed that the then minister was not committed to extending the train line to Mernda. Those on this side will recognise this fantastic anecdote about the Liberal opening. The Labor member for Yan Yean at the time, Danielle Green, gatecrashed Mr Mulder's celebration and she said the Baillieu government was:

... very good at cutting ribbons on Labor projects on the one hand and cutting services on the other.

I thought that was a great quote from the member for Yan Yean. It still holds so true today. If we look at the Big Build projects – and we have got great work going on in the electorate of Yan Yean with Bridge Inn Road, Yan Yean Road et cetera – for the four years or so that those opposite were in government, from 2010 to 2014, how much do you think they invested in infrastructure in Yan Yean? Can anyone guess how much they invested?

A member: \$3.

Lauren KATHAGE: Less than \$3.

A member: \$2.99.

Lauren KATHAGE: Less than \$2.99 – nothing. They invested nothing in any sort of ‘big’ or ‘build’ in Yan Yean for the time that they were in government. That is why our community continues to support Labor: because Labor is getting on with big builds all across Yan Yean. Going back to the then transport infrastructure minister, now Premier, she went on to ask:

What happened after the rail line was extended to South Morang? What happened for the years between 2010 and 2014? Nothing!

It is a well-recognised fact that there was no ‘big’, no ‘build’ and no ‘Big Build’ in Yan Yean in that time.

I would like to talk more now about this large mega-infrastructure project, which changed our community. As I said, we had people that came before dawn for the first train. It absolutely transformed our community. I would like to acknowledge Darren Peters and the rest of the community members who advocated so strongly for that. It was delivered six months ahead of schedule, a \$600 million project with three new train stations in Yan Yean and in Mill Park, and there was 18 months of construction. There were 1200 construction jobs and more than 1800 jobs in other industries. So it did a lot of work – more than 100 young apprentices learning new skills, delivering an extended rail line. Again, I emphasise that it was delivered six months ahead of schedule.

Mernda rail is delivering 982 train services each week to my community, with passengers taking up to 5000 trips every weekday from Mernda station and 8000 altogether on the Mernda extension – those multiple stations that I referred to. But we did not just build the extension and then stop. We have continued with the big builds with all the different work in my electorate. The Bridge Inn Road upgrade is nearly complete. That has duplicated a large section of road. We have got the Yan Yean Road stage 2 upgrade as well. We have already done Plenty Road. We are running out of roads but will continue to make big, bold builds in Yan Yean.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (17:31): That is 10 minutes of our lives we will not get back and a history lesson none of us needed; even some of the members on the other side are almost falling asleep. But I am more than happy to rise to speak up for the people of north-west Victoria, or should I say tropical north Victoria, because there is still sun shining up there this afternoon. As we have heard from every other member making a contribution on the matter this evening, the Big Build is not just rotten, it is an absolute stinker. I have been saying it for years when people come to me asking about the Murray Basin rail project and why we have not got efficient rail freight and why it was never finished, even though the government has said time and time again ‘Yes, it is – wait, no, it isn’t’ and ‘It’s finished. It works – no, it doesn’t.’ Where has the money gone? We know where the money has gone. It has gone into a big hole, or two, under the city. That is where the money has gone, that \$440 million, underneath the city, because it appears that the Labor government do not care how they get their food. They do not care what we are growing, their food and their fibre, up in the north-west of the state and even down through central Victoria. They do not care about that. They care about the fact that they can go to the supermarket and they can go to a café and have their avocado on toast and their almond latte – who grows that? – and the toast that it comes on, whether it is sourdough or multigrain or whatever. Stuff coming from those –

Emma Kealy interjected.

Jade BENHAM: The orange juice. It is citrus season at the moment, and the oranges are delicious, I might add, because most of them in Australia are grown in the Mildura region. They are delicious, but where does it come from and how does it get to port? We are exporting a huge amount of product overseas. Not only are we feeding the nation, we produce more than enough food to feed this nation. Food security is not an issue. We feed the world in fact. The trouble is getting that food to port efficiently via rail is impossible at the moment. It is impossible. We are running a train that is over 1.5 kilometres long that takes 16 hours to get from Mildura to Melbourne, and you have to go via Ararat. That is like jumping in your car and driving to Melbourne via Shepparton. Why would you do that? There is a bit of common sense lacking here. You could catch up with a few different people. You could catch up with all the rest of the Victorian Nationals team if you had to do that to get to Melbourne. It makes no sense, because common sense seems to be completely bereft in the Labor government.

I know you are trying hard not to grin and agree with me, Acting Speaker. Of course he is grinning. I hear the moans and I hear the heckling on the other side every time I talk about our food and fibre producers and the fact that without us you would be naked, hungry and sober. I hear the moans every time I start talking about this, but, you know what, come and spend a week. It is not enough to understand where your food comes from, but come and spend a week with me in tropical north Victoria or in Lowan, in Murray Plains, in Gippsland South or East – take your pick; they are equally as good gentlemen – or in Euroa. Well, I might be misleading the Parliament there slightly. Spend it in Shepparton, another huge food-producing region, another food bowl – they try and claim it, but they are not. It is okay. They are a little bit smaller. But a week is not enough time to understand what actually goes into growing food and fibre and how hard it is logistically to move that food and fibre. So when we hear up in these food and fibre producing regions about \$440 million being squandered away on the Murray Basin rail project, and when we hear about \$40 billion across major projects like the Metro Tunnel and North East Link, all we think about is ‘Here we are, no train, no passenger rail’.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Yes, I know, we get this all the time: ‘Who shut it down?’ You know why it was closed down, right? Do you know why? Because when Kennett came in, the state was broke. What is happening now, and who broke it? Who sent us broke? After Cain and Kirner we were broke. History is not only repeating itself, it is getting worse. We like to say we never forget these historical things that happened, but it appears the Labor government have not only forgotten, they are making bigger mistakes now. Every Victorian is paying the price for their inability to manage major projects and their inability to manage a budget. Every Victorian family is paying the price.

I did allude to the passenger train, which is gone – yes, it has been gone for a little while – but there are a couple of very simple things. I mean, this is another thing that grinds our gears when we talk about these infrastructure blowouts, and these are just transport infrastructure things; do not get me started on roads. But let us talk about a river crossing, in fact another river crossing. Because we do not have efficient rail freight, the trucks on our roads have gone from what back in the 1980s might have been a semitrailer – your prime mover and your single trailer – to B-doubles, then road trains, and now we are at B-quads. Every logistics company, domestically or export, is running B-quad trucks, and the trailers are heavy. They are long, and they are not getting off the road for anything. So when you have got a road that is less than 3 metres wide, and I know they are because I get out and measure them, with drop-offs that are 8 centimetres or more, and I know they are because I get out and measure them – I do not know what the trigger is for those to be fixed – if you have got a family coming in in a four-wheel drive or, heaven forbid, a little hatchback, and we know cars are not made like they used to be, like they were –

Members interjecting.

Jade BENHAM: I would love to take some of the members on the other side, put them behind a wheel and have them take on a road train coming the opposite way on a road that is so narrow and that they are only on because common sense has not prevailed and because all of that money that could have fixed the issue has gone into Big Build project blowouts. It is simply not good enough. Labor cannot manage money. It is proof they cannot manage money and they cannot manage projects. Country Victorians are paying the price. Country families are paying the price. We are sick of it. Here is some common sense.

Lauren Kathage: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I note the continual interjections of the member for Lowan, who is not in her seat.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): The member for Lowan knows the standing orders, and the member will take her seat if she wants to interject.

Jade BENHAM: With the couple of minutes I have got left I would like to illustrate a couple of examples of what I think might be a little bit of common sense and forward thinking, because what is also very apparent is that with these infrastructure projects, particularly out in the regions, there is no forward thinking at all. We actually need a good 20-, 30- or 50-year vision. Here is a little bit of this. Our intermodal at the moment takes a rail line that goes right through the centre of the city. Move that south to Red Cliffs. If we could use some of this Big Build blowout money, we could then have a heavy vehicle bypass to get those big B-quads out of our main street. They go right through our main street, up Deakin Avenue. So if we move the intermodal south and get rid of that train line through town, freeing up all that land for, I do not know, housing – who knew? A bit of common sense – we could do that and then reinstate that Maryborough freight corridor so you could get those 1.5-kilometre trains to Melbourne and back. You could turn them around within 24 hours – who knew? Efficiency. Then you could put your Sunraysia–Mallee port link intermodal in Ouyen so trucks are not travelling all around the state to the city, to the port. They would only have to go to Ouyen. It reduces the length of the trucks, reduces your axle weights and reduces the wear and tear on the roads. It makes sense.

Imagine if you could reallocate some of that money. It just makes sense – not these stinking, rotten money pits under the city, which are perfect examples of the Labor government being completely bereft of the ability to manage money, to manage a budget, to think outside of the freeways and to actually care about the people rather than just continued power in the city. It absolutely stinks, and every single Victorian from now until my grandkids' generation will be paying the price.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (17:41): That was like 4 o'clock on Christmas Day. Everyone has had a few drinks, and everyone is getting some great ideas for infrastructure projects. I am really interested that the member for Mildura is passionate about getting trucks off local roads, because so am I. My community, adjacent to the busiest port in the country, is about to be delivered an infrastructure project that is going to take 9000 trucks off roads every single day in Melbourne's inner west. We are going to have truck bans on key residential roads, and we are going to have enforcement cameras to make sure that the trucks stay off those roads and use the West Gate Tunnel. It is very exciting to have a second river crossing so that when the West Gate stops there is an alternative for the people of Melbourne to move around. I do not know if anyone has ever watched *Parks and Recreation* and the community engagement meetings they have, but it was along those lines.

The largest public transport project since 1981 is also going to be delivered next year. A few things happened in 1981 – and I am probably showing my age here, because I am 42 and I was born in 1982, a year after the city loop opened. That was the same year that IBM launched its first microcomputer, which was very large. It was when Charles and Diana got married. It was when the first *Donkey Kong* was released. This is about the same era that the Victorian Liberal Party are running their operations in 2024. We are part of a government that believes in building the infrastructure for our state that we love, the greatest jurisdiction in the world, the greatest city in the world. We need these public transport and road infrastructure projects so that our city can keep moving and keep growing. We are going to

be bigger than Sydney soon. I think the municipalities of Wyndham and Melton are bigger than Adelaide already.

So this remarkable growing city that we have needs this infrastructure, and it needs a government with the vision to deliver it. Of course the Metro Tunnel was cancelled by the Napthine government; it was all too hard and a bit too visionary. Why would we want to make public transport better in the City of Melbourne? Well, now it is going to be delivered next year, and, you know what, it is adding 60 per cent capacity to the Sunbury line, member for Sunbury. That is very exciting for the people of Sunbury but also for the people of Footscray, because we are going to have a turn-up-and-go service at Footscray station, the busiest station outside the city loop. The timetable will go the way of the VCR and the Nokia phone. I know that those opposite are also fans of those pieces of infrastructure.

A member interjected.

Katie HALL: Yes, playing a bit of *Snake* on the train. It is one of the most advanced projects not just in our state but in our nation's history, and when it opens the benefits to our communities will be felt immediately. Every person catching a train is not burning fuel on the road, and they are reducing emissions. It is not just about convenience; it is about getting cars off the road and about cleaner air, cleaner water and safer streets for our kids, member for Sunbury. It is about affordable and accessible public transport to get people where they need to be safely and reliably.

At peak construction the Big Build is delivering jobs too – 50,000 jobs across the state, both directly and indirectly. I would like to hear the members opposite tell the workers from their communities that they do not want them to have their jobs on these transformational projects for Victoria. The Allan Labor government is not wasting a day getting on with the work that needs to be done to deliver for Victorians, and that is just what is happening.

Going back to Christmas, it is like Christmas next year in Footscray, because we have got the beautiful new Footscray Hospital reaching practical completion – \$1.5 billion. To get those 5000 workers to the Footscray Hospital, they can catch the Metro Tunnel, and they will be able to catch it from the Parkville health precinct to the Footscray health precinct. When they get to Footscray station turn-up-and-go service, they will be able to get on a next-generation tram, and those trams are going to be built in Victoria – that is pretty exciting – out in Dandenong. They will be able to get on the tram and go directly to the new Footscray Hospital. While they are on the way there, they will not have to worry about dodging trucks on Moore Street, because there will be a 24-hour truck ban. There will be enforcement cameras to make sure the trucks stay where they are meant to stay, and that is on the West Gate Tunnel Project.

One of the most frequent conversations I have with constituents is about how the West Gate Tunnel is going to make our air cleaner, about how it fixes this wicked problem that we have been living with for decades in Melbourne's inner west – that, yes, the trucks are getting bigger, the port is getting busier and we do not have the road infrastructure to take the trucks directly into the port. We do not have the road infrastructure, so they use local roads in my community. It has been a source of frustration for decades. Finally, we are getting the road infrastructure we need to resolve this problem, and I know that in our community we cannot wait for that but not just that; it is the 14 kilometres of additional bike lanes and walking tracks that will come with the West Gate Tunnel. I am watching the veloway being hung underneath the West Gate Tunnel.

Josh Bull interjected.

Katie HALL: Yes, I will be getting the BMX out and heading down the veloway. It has been in the shed for a while. I think people are really looking forward to the livability improvements that this will deliver for our community. I was really excited last week to go into Arden station on a tour organised by the member for Sunbury. I went with a whole heap of colleagues, including the member for Mordialloc over there. He is very excited about Arden station. One of the most exciting things for

me was looking up and seeing West Footscray as the destination on the screens in the Arden station. It is a beautiful project, and people in my community just cannot wait to be able to use that.

I would like the opposition to be telling the children at my kids' school that they should not be able to ride their bike to school safely and that they should have to deal with the trucks and navigate those issues. This is the practical, real-life reality of what the West Gate Tunnel and the Metro Tunnel will do for a community like mine in Melbourne's inner west – a growing community as well, because in the next 10 years our population is going to grow 160 per cent. In the City of Melbourne and more broadly across Greater Melbourne we are growing rapidly, but what we have from those opposite is this aspiration that we do nothing, that we invest in nothing and that we have no vision – no vision for Victoria, just do the same thing over and over again.

A member interjected.

Katie HALL: Great interjection from opposite the chamber. This is a vision. This is an amazing vision. It is not just us that think it, it is the people of Victoria, because they have voted for it three times. We have not wasted a day to deliver the infrastructure that they have asked for, that they have endorsed at the ballot box time and time again. I feel like it is time, going back to the future from 1981 over there, where you can either get with the program and support transformational infrastructure for the people of Victoria or you can just keep getting rejected at the ballot box, because what we are delivering is what the people of Victoria want. The numbers are dwindling over there; they are dwindling. It is pretty bleak.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (17:51): I rise to support the matter of public importance submitted by the member for Caulfield, which goes to the heart of the rot that has infested Victoria. Today we are faced with a staggering betrayal of public trust exposed by the revelations from *60 Minutes* and the *Age* revealing appalling failures and corruption. The evidence is undeniable. Secret recordings have revealed CFMEU fixers arranging kickbacks to union officials, effectively bribing them to funnel corrupt companies onto taxpayer-funded projects. This underhanded scheme is not an isolated incident, it is a systemic abuse of power that has plagued Victoria's Big Build program.

The \$216 billion Suburban Rail Loop is another glaring example of mismanagement and irresponsibility. This project is not just a fiscal nightmare, it is a ticking time bomb for Victoria's financial future. With our state's debt projected to reach \$187.8 billion by 2027, the burden of this wasteful project threatens essential services and infrastructure that Victorians rely on every single day. Victorians deserve better than to have their money squandered and their future compromised by a government that has shown nothing but disregard for fiscal responsibility and ethical standards and nothing but disregard for their hard-earned taxpayer money.

The CFMEU's corruption and criminal activity is not just morally reprehensible, it is making the lives of everyday Victorians worse. The CFMEU's criminal corruption is making it more expensive to build and buy a home, but do not take my word for it. When asked 'Has the CFMEU made building apartments and houses in the suburbs more expensive?' it was an emphatic yes from Phil Dwyer, national president of the Builders Collective of Australia. Chief executive of Master Builders Australia Denita Wawn said:

Ultimately, anything that occurs that costs money in our sector is passed on to the client.

We have always said that up to 30 per cent increases occur on construction sites, because of the activities of the CFMEU.

Victorians, if you are wondering why your housing costs are 30 per cent more here than in any other state; if you are wondering why Victoria has greater debt than any other state in the nation – more than Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania combined; if you are wondering why as early as 2021 the *Australian Financial Review* identified Victoria as the worst state to do business in; and if you are wondering why businesses are packing up and leaving the state in droves – 152,000 in the past 12 months – this is why, Victoria. It is because a corrupt and complicit Allan Labor government has

enabled the gangsters, the criminals and the bikies in the CFMEU to run this state. In fact criminal thug Harry Korras was caught on tape explaining where the money goes, saying that one-fifth of every dollar spent on a construction site goes directly to the kickbacks of the criminal thugs. Shame on you, Allan Labor government. Shame.

When people vote for the Greens, they might mistakenly think that they are voting for a party that is all about helping the environment, saving the trees, utopia and all of that. But the CFMEU protests around Australia have actually shown and revealed what the Greens political party's true colours are, and that is that the Greens are the same as the CFMEU thugs. At the CFMEU protests there were deplorable signs being shown of MPs with Nazi symbolism on them. The Greens member for Griffith was there campaigning with union powerbroker Michael Ravbar, who was fined more than \$225,000 for breaches of the Fair Work Act 2009. I say to you: when you see CFMEU thuggery in your neighbourhood, the Greens protect it; when you read stories of how the CFMEU bully people to death, the Greens defend it; and when you read about the CFMEU getting in bed with bikie gangs and organised crime, the Greens do not condemn them – they rally to support them. I read that John Setka has got a new tattoo on his neck which says 'God forgives; the CFMEU doesn't.' What I am wondering is whether the Greens voters across our state will ever forgive the Greens political party for getting in bed with the criminal and thuggish CFMEU. Allow me to highlight this quote from a very famous former Labor MP, who said this union's:

... complete disdain for the law, their frequent resort to practices of thuggery and physical coercion, have no place in our society.

He added that this union:

... has demonstrated nothing but contempt for the system and values of Australian society. There should now be no basis upon which it can hope to elicit any measure of protection or support from our society.

Bob Hawke was able to say this of the Builders Labourers Federation, the precursor to the CFMEU. Why can't the Greens political party?

Let me give you a timeline of how the CFMEU and the gangs took over this state. In 2003 the Cole report was handed down, detailing 392 instances of unlawful activity in the CFMEU, and recommended 23 union officials face criminal charges. In 2010 Victoria Police revealed strong ties between the Hells Angels, the CFMEU and drug importers. In 2014, *7.30* revealed again the links between organised crime figures in exchange for construction contracts. In 2017 then CFMEU Secretary John Setka publicly threatened to target the home addresses of building watchdog inspectors and lobby local footy clubs so that their kids 'will be ashamed of who their parents are' – deplorable.

In 2019 John Setka pleaded guilty to the harassment of a woman, and his mate, gangland boss Mick Gatto, reached out to offer his support. In April 2022 Jacinta Allan as Minister for Transport Infrastructure was sent a letter from an Indigenous labour hire firm claiming the union's officials were threatening violence on state-funded projects, and then she took one year to reply to them. On 14 July 2024 an exposé revealed so much criminal activity that the government was finally forced to act – only after the Premier came out of hiding three days after the fact. The Premier wants you to think that the connection between organised crime and the CFMEU is a recent development, but anyone who lives in this state knows that the Allan Labor government has known all along and that they are absolutely complicit and absolutely corrupt.

In closing, sometimes in my community people reach out to me after watching question time and say to me, 'All the government does is yell and attack and hurl childish insults. I can't believe my taxpayers money is paying for this.' Fair enough, that is a very fair question. Although it is hard to believe, your taxpayer money is actually funding worse than that. As reported in the *Age*, Labor-funded senior CFMEU –

Lauren Kathage: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I just note that the correct way to refer to the Acting Speaker is not 'you'.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): Thank you for the point of order. I remind members in the house not to refer to the Speaker as ‘you’.

Nicole WERNER: As reported in the *Age*, Labor-funded senior CFMEU Indigenous organiser Joel Shackleton repeatedly threatened to violently bash an Indigenous worker at a taxpayer-funded Big Build site. Joel said to this Indigenous man that he would:

... f---ing end you c--- and you know it, don't f--- with me. I'll f---ing take your soul and I'll rip your f---ing head off, don't f--- with me, c---. F--- you, you're a f---ing dog.

This is Victoria under Labor: an Indigenous man abused, his life threatened and Labor's response to this, of course, a 20 per cent pay rise. Well, these are the people who love funding the Labor Party. And the Premier and that side of the house, my goodness, don't they love to visit a government-funded Big Build site? Don't they love dressing up in a hard hat at the CFMEU construction sites for all of the photos for their social media? Well, I will remind the Premier and that side of the house that the standard that you walk past is the standard you accept, and when you walk past abusive CFMEU worksites, you accept their behaviour.

Bills

Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (18:00): Further to my previous contribution, I rise to continue in support of the Residential Tenancies and Funerals Amendment Bill 2024. Currently funeral providers are not required to display their price lists online or at their business premises. Funerals are difficult to arrange. They come at a time of grief and emotional turmoil for many. They need to be acted on quickly, and the views and feelings and often the financial circumstances of many different family members need to be taken into account when decisions are made.

Some people can make this time easier on the loved ones they have left behind by leaving instructions or letting people know their wishes, and I am very grateful that my late father made many decisions before he passed that assisted us through this difficult time. I am also very grateful to Joanne and the team at Tobin Brothers in Glenroy, who did such a wonderful job assisting us to navigate this difficult time and helping us provide a beautiful send-off for Dad.

Knowing that for nearly every family, costs are a consideration, Joanne sensitively advised us on costs and alternatives, and although we did not have to choose a coffin, as Dad generously donated his body to the University of Melbourne for medical research in the hope of helping other people with spinal injury, I was very grateful that Tobin Brothers provided all of their prices for coffins and caskets up-front on their website. And I must say that they have some awesome alternatives. You can choose environmentally friendly coffins, coffins with photos or designs vinyl-wrapped on them, literally a cardboard box – which, for the record, I am quite happy with, especially as it is biodegradable – and even a woven wicker casket for \$1700, which I also quite like. Of course you can also choose a top-of-the-range majestic gold coffin for \$47,000. Armed with this information, you can go home and in the privacy of your own space browse through slowly and privately and make choices without having to ask awkward and what may feel inappropriate but are important questions in the middle of a family meeting setting. This bill will make sure that all funeral providers will have to provide those costs up-front, just like Tobin Brothers already do, helping people make appropriate choices respectfully and with dignity.

Funeral directors provide care and exceptional service to families at a time when support is needed the most and assist families and loved ones with the utmost compassion and respect. This legislation will

also make the work they do easier by avoiding awkward conversations about costs. I commend this bill to the house.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (18:03): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (18:03): I am pleased to spend quite a bit of time in the house this afternoon, and I move now to what is another –

Steve McGhie interjected.

Josh BULL: Absolutely, member for Melton – not as much as you, though. I am pleased to have the opportunity to be moving to what is another important bill, which goes to a relatively straightforward change to the provisions around the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust, the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024. What we know is that both Melbourne and our state are certainly hives of activity when it comes to conferences and when it comes to international travel. People are wanting to come to our city and our state for all that they have to offer. There are of course a range of great venues right across our city, and we know that the visitor economy contributes a significant amount – billions of dollars – to our economy for a vast range of conferences and gatherings. They are of course attended both domestically and internationally. The provision in this legislation goes to what stand as the governance arrangements for the trust. We know that the governing legislation has adequately served since its enactment; however, there is an opportunity that exists to update the act to enable the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) trust to better support Victoria's tourism and events industry.

The main change through this amendment is of course to change the trust's legal name and the name of the act, which is why we are here this evening – to do a whole range of other work but also to make this change. The trust we know has served for a significant period of time, and this bill changes the name of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Act 1996 to the Victorian Convention and Event Trust Act 1996. That is to more broadly reflect the broader scope of what the trust delivers and indeed aspires to deliver with the facility and the new facility, which I will come to, but also reflect the status as the facility's operator across Victoria. Ensuring that these governance arrangements are fit for purpose, making sure that they are contemporary and ensuring that there is compatibility with statutory authorities as well is of course an important change that this piece of legislation delivers.

More broadly, though, in the year ending March 2024 our visitor economy hit a record high of just short of \$40 billion, reaching significant tourism targets that are set. Business events, including those held at MCEC, play a critical role in that success, and the 2024–25 state budget provided \$6.4 million over two years to support the Business Events Fund. This will enable Victoria, as I mentioned earlier, to continue to secure that strong pipeline of international business events and build on the more than \$24 million allocated from 2021–22 to 2024–2025 in the 2021–22 budget. Do not ask me to say that again. What we know and understand is that these are big numbers, and I can see those opposite shaking their heads. But these are big numbers, and they go to what is something that we should all agree on, and that is that we are a great city and a great state. People travel from all over the world to do business, to invest and to share in what is a great major events calendar and a whole lot more. And

whether that be the AFL, the AFL Grand Final, the Melbourne Cup, the Australian Open, the grand prix and so much more that we can offer right across our city, it is of course something that is incredibly important. But the governance arrangements around the drive for international visitation, research, industry, greater international collaboration and partnerships in education, science, transport and health are really important arrangements, so making sure that we have these opportunities but also having an act that reflects contemporary arrangements is a really important piece of work.

I do want to acknowledge and thank the many, many workers – the staff – who contribute to making these events happen. It is fair to say that as members of Parliament we do get the great opportunity and the privilege to effectively attend an event, hopefully give what is a well-received speech and speak to a lot of people at any one point in time. But it should never be lost that events such as these are a lot of work. They are a lot of hard work, and the staff who put our major events together do deserve a shout-out, an acknowledgement for the work that they do, because it is certainly a big logistical undertaking. I think sometimes we can gloss over just how much work is done to put on not just major events but conferences, including conferences that may take place in a venue that we are referring to in this legislation. We know that the Business Events Fund and the major events calendar do not work in isolation. They work as part of a network that we as a government are very proud of, and I want to extend an acknowledgement and thankyou to the staff and acknowledge the many, many, many thousands of people who work hard to put these arrangements in place. This goes to what I mentioned earlier – those arrangements that have been sought by the trust to better, more accurately reflect what the trust sees itself as and, more importantly, the work that is being done.

It is a significant undertaking. There is a great deal of work, and it takes, as I mentioned earlier, multiple agencies to put all of these things together. There is also the reflection within this piece of legislation of the increase, from seven to nine, in the number of board members. We know and understand that this is a relatively minor change, but what is not minor is the visitor economy: the international and domestic guests that come for our major offerings and the work that goes into providing for safe, secure, well-maintained and terrific venues. In the end, when we go to these venues, whether it be for a conference or a speaking engagement, I think we are fortunate to have these facilities within our community. That is why we as a government will keep investing in them, we will keep supporting the work that is being done and we will keep listening to trusts and the like to make sure that they have the resources and the governance arrangements that they deserve.

What we are doing through these arrangements – I know that there are quite a few speakers on our list who want to make contributions on this legislation – some of those arrangements particularly relate to the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre, which is on track to open in 2026. I know the member for Geelong – a very fine member who was speaking to me about this matter just a couple of days ago, and who certainly is a champion for her local community and someone who gets things done time and time again – is very excited for what this is going to mean for the Geelong and broader community. These are important measures and important steps. It is about being contemporary, it is about making sure we are listening, and with those remarks I happily commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (18:13): I rise today to give a contribution on the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024. I must say, I was a little bit put out as I did not get to stand to speak on this yesterday, so I am very pleased that in the last little bit before we go to the adjournment that I can stand up. Although we need to do this stuff, it is not life-changing stuff for the people down on the Latrobe Valley, but they will be sitting there watching the contribution. I do thank the member for Nepean for his lead yesterday and also the time that he put in to explain to us what this was all about. The bill has been introduced by the government in order to address and reflect changes to the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust's operations and remit. This includes the addition of the new convention centre in Geelong. I have a son who was living in Geelong and had the opportunity to drive past where the site was, and they had just started construction on that 12 or 18 months ago when I last went past. So this also takes into consideration the new Geelong convention centre, which will be a great asset, I am sure, for the people of Geelong. These changes

have been broadly viewed and are uncontroversial, with the bill necessary to address basic and expected changes to the trust's operations.

We have all been to the Melbourne convention centre; we have all walked past it. I know that as a country lad, when it was first open we would come up. There have been boat shows there which I have attended. There have been other functions that I have been lucky enough to go to, taking family members as well. It is a great asset for the state to be able to hold these conventions right throughout and to have the amount of people that we can actually have in there. I think over 5000 people can be seated in this venue. The total size is 70,000 square metres. As a plumber, seeing the size of the roof on the convention centre is mind-blowing, to be able to have a structure of that size and quality under one roofline. So it is a great venue to be had. As people have spoken about in this chamber, it is affectionately known as Jeff's Shed. It was built across different governments and extended to make sure that the people of Victoria have one of the best venues in Australia to be able to hold these conventions at. As I said before, it holds over 5000 people. The official number is 5541, and if you think about getting that many people into the venue and servicing them with food and drink, our hats go off to such a large employer inside our state, and our thanks goes to all the people that work there and keep us safe when that is on, which is really fantastic.

Going back, the main purposes of the bill are to amend the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Act 1996 to change the name of that act and the trust established by the act; to expand the functions of the trust – so we are just ging through with some governance here, making sure that we have got everything right; and to modernise the trust membership and governance arrangements. The bill will also make consequential amendments to other acts that refer to the trust. As we can see, there are key things that need to be done to make it work better and modernise it a little bit, I should say.

The key policy context for this bill is the expansion of the trust's remit to include the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre, as we spoke about, which is slated to open in 2026. We are in 2024 now, so in a couple of years time that will be opening. Hopefully having that in Geelong, being a regional centre – it is a city, but it is a regional centre – gives hope that there will be other convention centres, probably not on such a grand scale, that can be built around regional Victoria.

One of the issues that I think the member for Nepean highlighted was access and ability to get to the new convention centre in Geelong. I know that you only have to travel along the Geelong roads at times to see the traffic. Like the Monash Freeway up here when I travel home of a Thursday night or Friday morning, it does take time to get there. I hope that, expanding into the future, the fast rail does get built, so that if I am landing in Melbourne or if I am coming from the Latrobe Valley, I can jump on a train – maybe I can use the new Metro Tunnel system and the Suburban Rail Loop somehow, because otherwise I will not use them – and be able to get out to the Geelong precinct. Normally on our train travel down we get to Pakenham and have to get off. We get on buses and get brought in here at the moment. Our V/Line bus service is very, very good. Speaking about the Pakenham changeover, if we get off the bus to walk back to the train, we have to walk over 100 metres that are not covered to get to our train station. Maybe with that connection I might have to look at making sure that we have an undercover area. Heading back to the Melbourne convention centre, as I spoke about that roof line before, probably not as flash but something 180 metres long that can actually cover our patrons that are using train and bus facilities at that exchange. It would be great to be able to do that.

As I said, we have a lot of schools from right around the state that go to the convention centre when they come down for their Melbourne visits. I know that schools in my area come down and are lucky enough to come into Parliament House. I have got to try and get the schools that do come down to come in on a sitting week. I have a lot that come down in non-sitting weeks. Hopefully we can tune that up. They also get to go down to Jeff's Shed, as it is affectionately known to everybody around the place, to have a look at exhibitions and expos that are down there. It is, as I said, a great asset to not only the people of Melbourne but also our regional communities that can come down and access it.

Over the journey I heard the Leader of the Nationals talking about the boat show and the fishing convention that was down there. I have got a lot of mates that have boats and rave about the boat show down at the Melbourne convention centre. Just out of my area in the Latrobe Valley and into the member for Gippsland East's area there are a lot of people that have that boating lifestyle, up around Metung and the Gippsland Lakes. They talk about having all the boats underneath that one roof line of the convention centre. It is not only the boats that are in there. There are personal watercraft and there are fishing expos, as the Leader of the National Party said, so there is something for everybody. There are a few other expos that have been held down there which are very important for our local community in the Latrobe Valley, and we make sure that we can get down there.

As I said, these changes that are being done will make sure that the trust works properly and can give some discretion to the trust to be able to make sure that it runs properly and combines the future Geelong exhibition centre as it moves forward, because time is ticking on. That is going to be open in a couple of years. It is going to be a great asset. We do not oppose it. I think everybody is happy that we need to be able to do all of this and dot the i's and cross the t's to make sure that, as we move on, the convention centres will run smoothly into the future.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (18:24): I rise to make a brief contribution on the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024 – brief because I know that there are other members who want to speak on this bill tonight. The changes outlined in this amendment bill will strengthen Victoria's position as a premier destination for tourism and events both nationally and globally. And why are we a premier destination for tourism and events? Well, we are the sporting capital of Australia and we are the arts capital of Australia, but we also have these beautiful regions throughout the state. As many of you know, I have been deeply engaged with our wine industry over the last few years. One thing that sets us apart from the rest of Australia is that Victoria has 21 wine regions.

Belinda Wilson interjected.

Nick STAIKOS: We do need to do a tour, member for Narre Warren North; I can arrange that. When you think about the contribution that our winemakers make, and I think we have got something like 800 wineries across Victoria, most of them are small businesses. Most of them are mum-and-dad boutique wineries, but without them the Mornington Peninsula – and the member for Nepean is here – would be unrecognisable. Without our winemakers the Yarra Valley would be completely unrecognisable, and the same goes for the King Valley, Rutherglen and a whole host of others, so there are a lot. There is the Bellarine as well, member for Geelong, so there are a lot that make up this state's status as the premier destination for tourism and events.

This bill, the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024, is very important indeed because the act has long served as effective regulation of the trust governance and these changes are simply modernisations to the act in order to embed contemporary governance arrangements. A key aspect of the bill is to rename the trust and the act to more accurately represent the broader scope of responsibilities and expand the influence of the trust. These proposed changes will rename the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Act 1996 to the Victorian Convention and Event Trust Act 1996. This new title will capture the trust's expanded role, especially because it encompasses responsibility for the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre. I was just talking about that with the member for Geelong, who sits a few places away from me, and the member for Geelong tells me that she is very much looking forward to opening this fantastic new monument to her region in 2026.

This government listened to the trust's preference for the term 'event', which they believed better reflects the broader scope of their current and future work. This choice is particularly relevant with the addition of the new Geelong Convention and Event Centre, which also incorporates the term 'event' in its name for the same reason. The change, however, is not just in name but also in function, ensuring

that the trust's role in supporting Victoria's tourism and events sectors is more robust and adaptive to current and future challenges.

In addition to the renaming, the bill introduces several enhancements to the governance structure of the trust, updates that are designed to align the trust with contemporary governance practices and the expectations of our community. Firstly, expansion of trust membership: the maximum number of part-time trust members will be increased from seven to nine. Secondly, appointment of leadership roles: the amendment will enable the minister to appoint a deputy chairperson and/or an acting chairperson. This ensures continuous and effective leadership within the trust, even in the absence of the chairperson. Thirdly, strengthened conduct provisions: the amendment expands the scope of conduct that may lead to the removal or suspension of a trust member, aligning the trust with comparable statutory authorities. Fourthly, updated vacancy provisions: the automatic vacancy provisions will be amended to state that the office of a trust member becomes vacant if the member becomes insolvent under administration. Fifthly, voting rights clarification: the amendment clarifies that acting members of the trust will possess the same voting rights as substantive members, ensuring equal participation in decision-making processes.

As I said earlier, the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre is the premier event venue in Victoria and through the effective stewardship of this trust has continued to host fantastic events this year. Earlier this year I represented the government at the opening of one of those events. It was the Lions Club international convention. More than 10,000 people attended that convention from all over the world and more than a million people were watching it on the live stream from around the world because there are a lot of Lions members around the world. The sheer scale of this event was truly remarkable. What was really great about this convention was that these more than 10,000 visitors stayed in our hotels, enjoyed our restaurants and bars and visited amazing tourist attractions. Some might have even visited our 21 distinct wine regions that I spoke of earlier. Seventy-five per cent of the attendees were from overseas, and many of them stayed for longer and dispersed into regional Victoria. Even some of the leaders of the Lions that I met on the day had holiday plans booked after the conference, and I did speak to a number of Lions members, not all 10,000 but a number of them – nearly all 10,000 – and they had some holidays booked as well for the conclusion of the conference. It is why the Allan government supports business events like these – because every dollar we spend attracting them pays dividends.

I support this legislation. I think it just adds to the diversity and to the ecosystem around our tourism agenda here as a government. I commend the bill to the house, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (18:31): I also rise today to speak on the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024. This bill represents a step towards modernising and expanding the scope of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust, and the updates are a necessary and welcome change to how the trust operates, so we will be supporting the bill. However, while the bill concentrates on the changes necessitated by the new Nyaal Banyul convention centre in Geelong, the trust is not just responsible for the convention centres and the exhibition centre. It also has some responsibilities for our World Heritage listed Royal Exhibition Building in Carlton Gardens, which is of course in my electorate and a place that is really dear my heart. This bill has unfortunately missed quite an important opportunity to provide much-needed support for this historic building, which has some challenges which I would like to talk about in my speech today.

The Royal Exhibition Building highlights Victoria's incredible cultural heritage, with the building recognised globally for its historical and architectural significance as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2004. The building and the surrounding Carlton Gardens are absolute treasures which deserve our utmost care and attention. However, the management system of this World Heritage site remains hidden deep within other legislation, and as such the asset is consistently undervalued and also overlooked.

First, let us consider the current inclusion of the Royal Exhibition Building within the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Act 1996. This inclusion, while initially perhaps a convenient measure, has proven unable to meet the unique requirements of managing a World Heritage site. The responsibilities that come with its World Heritage status demand a more specialised and dedicated approach, something that only an independent management authority can provide. Several passionate local groups, including the Protectors of Public Lands Victoria and the Friends of the Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens, have contacted me and I have had contact with them over many years – the last 10 years I have been in this place – regarding their concern about the current management of the Royal Exhibition Building. Really it is about time that we fix this. They argue, and rightly so, that independent legislation and a dedicated management authority must be introduced to govern this site effectively. Such an authority would ensure that the government is meeting all UNESCO obligations for World Heritage sites and that the Royal Exhibition Building receives the attention and resources it needs to fulfil its potential as a cultural and economic asset for Victoria.

Our government must honour the historical commitments it has made. In 2004 the Victorian government assured that a separate board would be established to manage the site – 20 years ago – but unsurprisingly, this commitment remains unfulfilled. UNESCO requires exemplary governance structures to protect World Heritage sites, and we are so fortunate that we have this World Heritage site. We need to look after it, and we must ensure that we meet these obligations. New South Wales and Tasmania have managed to do so to protect the Sydney Opera House and the Port Arthur Historic Site, so there is no reason Victoria cannot do the same.

The governance structure of the Royal Exhibition Building is needlessly fragmented and has not served the site, and it has not served our state well. It has led to a lack of coordinated management, a lack of public accountability and inadequate preservation of this significant cultural site. I have visited the exhibition building many times, but I visited just a short time ago and saw some of the challenges they are having around preserving the site with the small budget that they are given – even challenges around ensuring disability access. There has been some federal money committed, which was as a result of advocacy from the federal Greens leader Adam Bandt. He managed to secure \$20 million for the upgrade and restoration of the dome at the exhibition building, and many people here might have actually gone and taken the tour, where you get to go up to the dome and the top of that building. What an incredible experience that is and how fortunate we are that we were able to do that restoration, but there is a lack of funding to maintain the site. We saw some incredible paintings on the inside of the site. I personally did my university exams there. People might know the building from university exams – not a very fun experience, but a beautiful place to do them. Perhaps other people have happier memories of going to the exhibition building – concerts and fairs. We have so many different events that happen there. The Affordable Art Fair is on there this Friday. There are some beautiful paintings. When you go in there if you look up you can see these incredible paintings, but they do not have the money or the resources to do the restoration of those paintings and to ensure that they are not being degraded over time. All of these things are matters where a better governance structure could assist them in in doing that work that is so necessary to make sure that it does not lose World Heritage status, that we do not lose this incredible, incredible piece of Melbourne's heritage.

The authority is important because it would be a place that is responsible for preserving and promoting one of Australia's few World Heritage sites. Such an authority should have statutory independence. It should be publicly accountable and receive appropriate funding to manage the site effectively. Essentially it should not be at the whims of the government of the day. It should be given ongoing secure funding to ensure that we are maintaining this beautiful area, the Carlton Gardens, which are incredible, as well as the exhibition building. Such an authority could also work to enhance public recognition of the Royal Exhibition Building's significance and improve its conservation, ensuring it remains a vibrant part of our community and economy. A lot of people do not even know that it is World Heritage listed, that we have this incredible site right in the middle of our city, just in short walking distance from Parliament House. The economic and cultural benefits of a properly managed World Heritage site are absolutely immense. A well-supported Royal Exhibition Building can attract

tourism, provide educational opportunities – outside of the exams, hopefully – and serve as a focal point for cultural events, all of which contribute to a vibrant economy for our state while ensuring we do not risk losing UNESCO recognition of this site.

The Greens support the amendments proposed in this bill, but I am disappointed that it does not go further and make other much-needed changes to the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Act – namely, establishing a dedicated management authority for the Royal Exhibition Building and the beautiful Carlton Gardens. If the government is unable to do that in this bill, I really urge it to commit to doing so soon in a separate piece of legislation. I would be more than happy to work with the government to do that and to sit down with the community groups, who are so deeply invested in this and are putting in countless hours of volunteer time to preserve and advocate for this incredible site, to ensure that the site is preserved, that its potential is realised and that it is protected for our children and grandchildren.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (18:39): I am pleased to rise to contribute on the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024. I know that they are fairly simple changes, but this bill is actually really important to my community of Geelong. The bill changes the name of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Act 1996 to the Victorian Convention and Events Trust Act 1996. That trust will be also managing the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre once it is complete. This bill will strengthen the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust governance arrangements in a number of ways, which we have already heard about in this place, so I really do want to focus on the Geelong centre and what this means for Geelong.

The Nyaal Banyul Geelong convention centre has engaged the Wadawurrung, the traditional owners, right from the very beginning, and there has been a lot of conversation about the convention centre, which I will get on to in a moment. But the Wadawurrung traditional owners have given the Geelong convention centre the name Nyaal Banyul, which is ‘open your eyes to the hills’. When you are standing on that beautiful north-facing – which is rare – site where the convention centre is being built, you look towards the bay and you see the You Yangs or Wurdi Youang, which is the Aboriginal name for it, and that is how the name came about. So ‘open your eyes to the hills’ has been gifted to the Geelong convention centre, and we are really excited about that.

Both the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre and the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre will be managed by the trust to leverage expertise and opportunities for collaboration across each centre, and this collaboration will cement Victoria as a premier global destination for events. We are very much looking forward to those opportunities in Geelong. This Geelong Convention and Event Centre has been in the making for over 30 years, and I do want to acknowledge all those Geelong stakeholders that have been involved in that journey, those that are no longer with us and those of the present who have worked tirelessly to get this commitment. I am really proud that the Andrews–Allan Labor government have made that commitment. It is now coming out of the ground. You can see the Crown Plaza has already got its signage up and is getting ready, and the rest of the centre, which is significant on our beautiful north-facing waterfront, and the Geelong community are really excited about it.

Geelong is the largest regional city in the state, so we have many visitors to our region and tourism opportunities. The convention centre has already created an enormous number of jobs on construction and will do up until its opening in 2026, but it is also engaged with our local TAFE in terms of apprenticeships. It is engaged with our local organisations, such as GROW, which will actually provide employment for long-term unemployed people in my community, so it is doing a whole lot of things as well as ending up as a significant opportunity for the Geelong region. Of course the jobs that will come from that in the future once it is finished are also significant for my community, and the federal government have contributed funding to this as well.

I do want to acknowledge the Honourable John Brumby, who has been very actively involved in the conversations around the Geelong Convention and Event Centre and the engagement with the

Wadawurrung community, making sure the Wadawurrung are involved from the very beginning in the artworks that will be commissioned for that. But also what is really pleasing is the opportunity for the Wadawurrung to display many of their artefacts in the foyer entrance once it is complete. There will be glass cabinets provided for the Wadawurrung to display some of their artefacts, which is really important. People like Wadawurrung traditional owner Corrina Eccles are committed to engaging with the trust to ensure that their cultural heritage is acknowledged. There is a corner of that site where the first Aboriginal child was stolen from the Aboriginal community, which has great significance to the Wadawurrung people. Also, there was a building on that site, which was demolished, and the Wadawurrung say those bricks that that building was built out of were ochre from their country. They want those things acknowledged, and they have a commitment from not only the Honourable John Brumby but the broader community that that will happen.

This is really exciting for Geelong. It is a 1.6-hectare waterfront site that will see a 1000-seat venue, two large exhibition spaces, meeting rooms, conference facilities and flexible event spaces. Included in that is the very strong commitment to ensuring that there is disability access, state-of-the-art disability access, and my understanding is that expert consultants have been brought in to ensure that that happens. It is really important for people with disabilities to be able to access our waterfront. Things have been changing and becoming better and better along the Geelong waterfront, but we want to make sure they have access to all the facilities to meet their needs so that they can use those sorts of facilities.

I also think it is important to point out that, along with the convention centre, we also have our beautiful new Geelong Arts Centre, which was recently opened and completely rebuilt, and we have our beautiful Geelong Gallery, which hopefully will have a redevelopment in the future. That arts precinct is really important. You make your way down past the Geelong National Wool Museum. There are all sorts of connections that can be made with this exhibition centre that we have not been able to make before. The opportunities are unlimited for what this will do for my community but also for Melbourne and Victoria more broadly. I know people are piling on our cheap train rides now into regional Victoria and coming in to Geelong from other outlying regions to enjoy what we have now, whether it be the gallery or whether it be the Geelong Art Centre or the National Wool Museum. Now they will be able to come to events and exhibitions at the new Nyaal Banyul centre once it is completed in Geelong.

This is really exciting for my community. I can see and feel the excitement across the community, because we can now see it is coming out of the ground. Although there is still a fair way to go before the building is completed, you can actually see the physical change happening week by week, which is really exciting. And the workers on the job are really excited about that; the apprentices are really excited about that. We are really looking forward to that. I think there is that connection that we have been able to make to different services in our community to support long-term unemployed people and to support TAFE students. Our Gordon TAFE is providing those apprenticeships, as is Gforce, another service in our community; they are all involved in ensuring that we have the best possible outcome for the Nyaal Banyul centre once it is completed. So a huge thanks to all those that have been involved, and in particular to Regional Development Victoria, who have played a significant role in managing this. This has been many years of conversations, but I know this outcome and the involvement of the Melbourne trust will make a big difference.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (18:49): I too rise with some excitement to contribute on the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024, and with 12 minutes left on the clock, I might be seeking an extension at some point as well. It was really terrific to hear from the member from Geelong and to hear of her excitement but also to hear of the benefit that the new Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre will have for her community. To know that it is rising there from a former car park and what it is about to become is really exciting for her community and that whole Bellarine community.

The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill amends the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Act 1996 to change the name of the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust

while also modernising and strengthening its governance. It is an opportunity to enable the trust to better support Victoria's tourism and events industries at both the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) and the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre, which is set to open in 2026.

It is no secret that Victoria has a bustling and vibrant tourism and major events calendar. Already we are home to buzzing sporting events such as the Formula One Grand Prix and the Australian Open, but we do also boast global forums, business events, festivals and multicultural events. Victoria really is the place to be.

Tim Richardson interjected.

Gary MAAS: Yes, indeed. The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre has long been the venue of choice. It has great facilities and a central location and really is a blank canvas for some wideranging events. Just personally, I was quickly jotting down some notes of some events that I have attended over a few years. They range from ageing Canadian folk-rock singer Neil Young through to the architect Kevin McCloud through to various health and superannuation conferences.

Tim Richardson interjected.

Gary MAAS: Get some keynotes. Well, there is nothing like doing a keynote at the MCEC. But, no, I cannot say I have done that, member for Mordialloc. But thank you for helping me pad out at least 20 seconds.

The Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee I mention here too because while we look at this convention centre as a large venue that helps facilitate large-type events, we actually hold the Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee meetings there. It only has 15 members. It meets about 12 times a year, but it needs facilities which support all-day board-type meetings. The Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee meets there, and I have spent a bit of time at the convention centre with that terrific committee and the work that it does.

As has been often mentioned throughout discussion of this bill, the name of the convention centre has been Jeff's Shed, and for some reason that name has stuck around. Thankfully the government that built it did not stick around in the same way.

The amendment bill brings the trust into contemporary governance and gives a more holistic leadership as a government-owned body which supports not only metropolitan Melbourne's tourism and events but also those in regional Victoria. With the trust taking on board Geelong's new Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre, the amendment reflects the trust's operations that this major regional facility will have alongside the MCEC. With that set to be completed in 2026, the Geelong Convention and Event Centre is an exciting development for Victoria which will attract growth, many major events and new jobs for the City of Greater Geelong. The Victorian government is investing some \$260 million in that project, with the Australian government contributing more than \$30 million and \$3 million from the City of Greater Geelong. It is an excellent example of partnership across all levels of government that will have a real impact and incredible flow-on effects for that fast-growing regional city. The bill will allow the GCEC and the MCEC to work in collaboration to ensure both Melbourne and Geelong are secured as destinations for major events for many years to come.

Our tourism and events industries have had to make many changes post COVID-19, but those changes are dealing with all of those emerging and some ongoing challenges that have come post that time. The bill expands the functions of the trust to support these industries as they adapt to a new world. This bill will improve transparency and accountability of the trust and how it operates to ensure that you can continue to develop and promote and manage those facilities in collaboration with the tourism and major events portfolio. It does this in a few ways: firstly, by increasing the maximum numbers of the trust from seven to nine part-time members to reflect new responsibilities with the appointment of the GCEC under the trust; secondly, by enabling the minister to appoint a deputy or acting chairperson

if needed; thirdly, by expanding scope of conduct to ensure greater consistency with other similar statutory authorities in that portfolio; and, fourthly, by updating the act to make it clear that an acting member has the same voting rights as substantive members.

As I said previously, we do know that Victoria is the place to be, it is the place to visit, and in the year ending March 2024 our government's 2024 tourism target was hit more than a year ahead of schedule, with Victoria's visitor economy reaching a record high \$39.3 million. And it is major events that have people attending from far and wide that play a role in this success. This includes those business events or forums held at MCEC as well. It is why our government, our state government, is committed to ensuring a strong pipeline of international business events and why in this year's state budget we have provided \$6.4 million over two years to support the business events fund. This builds on the more than \$24 million that had been allocated for 2021–22 through to 2024–25 in the 2021–22 state budget. This fund itself helps to maintain our state's status as an attractive destination while also supporting business events that promote international tourism, innovative research, collaboration and knowledge. Not only is it good for our standing on the national and global stage, but the best part is it really does help support Victorian jobs too. These events also keep our nightlife bustling and our hotels filled while attendees enjoy our restaurants and cafes or while they head out to regional Victoria. In 2023–24 the Melbourne Convention Bureau secured 19 international events using the business events fund, which will deliver around \$133 million to our state when they are held. These events, supported as part of the fund, range from the Global Entrepreneurship Congress in 2023 to the World Indigenous Cancer Conference held in 2024, and the 2024–25 budget provided an additional \$1.724 million to the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust to carry out final operations for the Geelong Convention and Event Centre.

In conclusion, I am proud to serve in this government in one of the best cities in the world, and we are a government that is dedicated to strengthening and modernising systems and the governance that ensures our city remains a leader on the national and global stage, and with that I commend this bill to the house.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (18:59): It is a pleasure to make a brief contribution this evening on the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024. I would like to begin by thanking the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events for his work on this important legislation and his ongoing commitment to the incredible region that is Geelong through legislation like this and various investments. As we know, the amendments to this bill will reflect the trust's new role as the operator of the Geelong Convention and Event Centre. In Geelong, if you drive past the site on a daily basis, you can literally see it going up in front of our eyes. It is an incredibly exciting opportunity for the community, and we are incredibly excited to be welcoming the Nyaal Banyul Geelong Convention and Event Centre precinct to our spectacular town.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Montrose intersection upgrade

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (19:00): (801) The Montrose community has endured significant disruption as a result of the Montrose intersection upgrade, so the action I seek from the Minister for Roads and Road Safety is that she provide a detailed project timeline covering the remaining stages of works and expected completion date for the project. Given the community was told originally these works would take 12 months, residents and small businesses are desperate to know if this timeline will be met, which would be around December this year or January 2025, and what they can expect with the remaining stages of works. While many residents in Montrose and surrounds wanted the intersection upgraded to address safety and traffic congestion, no resident is content with the

extraordinarily long project timeline of 12 months as outlined by the state government's Department of Transport and Planning or the severity and extent of the disruption to remove a roundabout and replace it with a signalled intersection.

The toll it has taken on residents and small businesses in Montrose is immense. Small businesses have suffered significant financial losses, and the state government has so far refused to compensate them. It has been hard for residents to access their homes or the Montrose Recreation Reserve for football and netball. On one occasion recently at a football match I was at at Montrose Recreation Reserve, a player was badly injured and the ambulance struggled to access the footy ground in a timely way because of the massive traffic disruptions due to the roadworks.

The Montrose CFA fire brigade have been very patient, but the disruption right outside their fire station certainly has impacted volunteer firefighters' ability to access the station and their ability to get the truck out to attend emergencies, whether that be fires, storms or road trauma.

Residents were told by the department of transport and its contractor that no roads would be closed during the course of the project works, and yet Montrose Road was closed. The communication from the Labor government's department of transport has been sporadic at best, with local residents and stakeholder reference group members having to chase up meeting minutes and meeting dates, which is totally unacceptable. The state government run stakeholder meetings have been exclusive, seeking to shut down local voices, and have been lacking in key detail about the upcoming stages of work, the nature of the works yet to be completed, when each stage of work is expected to be completed and if there will be any greater severity of disruption or further road closures.

My community understands there may be issues with severe rain or storms from time to time, but my community also has a reasonable expectation that the state government and its department of transport will be transparent and forthcoming with a fully detailed project timeline for the remaining stages of works and will provide as much detail as possible about when this project will be completed for the Montrose community.

Lyndhurst Secondary College

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (19:03): (802) The adjournment matter that I wish to raise is for the Minister for Education and concerns the funding for Lyndhurst Secondary College as announced in the state budget this year. The action that I seek is that the minister provide an update on the status of Lyndhurst Secondary College's upgrade, which will support students and families in my electorate of Narre Warren South. I welcome the funding, as it matches our commitment during the last state election. The minister and I in fact recently met with Ms Eloise Haynes, the school's principal, and I know that she is really grateful and very keen to see that this project comes to fruition as it moves towards the design and construction phases.

The population in the outer south-east is growing, and there is a need for more schools and improved facilities to support our school communities. The funding of Lyndhurst Secondary College builds on previous investments in schools in my area, such as Narre Warren South P-12 College, Hampton Park Secondary College, Hampton Park Primary School, Strathaird Primary School and the recently announced new Casey Central primary school, interim name. It is an incredible statistic that the Labor government has invested \$16.9 billion over the past 10 years to build new schools and deliver more than 2000 school upgrades. I look forward to visiting the school as works begin and staff, teachers and students start to take advantage of the new facilities. I thank the minister for his continued support of our area, and I look forward to sharing his response with my community.

Drought relief

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (19:04): (803) My adjournment debate this evening is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action I seek from the minister is to come down to the electorate of Polwarth in south-west Victoria to meet with representatives from the UDV – United Dairyfarmers of

Victoria – Australian Dairy Farmers and other key dairy industry groups and the broader Victorian Farmers Federation farmer cohort, who are really, really suffering at the moment with the green drought that we are experiencing in south-west Victoria. Some are saying it is the driest period for nearly 100 years – that you have got to go back over 100 years to experience the season that we are having at the moment. This season is crippling, but what is more crippling at the moment is the complete inaction from the government in recognising and putting public support behind it.

The Victorian government back in 2020 started a process called Victoria's drought preparedness and response framework. In a country like Australia and in an agricultural environment like Australia droughts are very predictable – we know that we will have one within a 10-year period. This plan has been underway for quite some time. Disappointingly, the government met with key stakeholders in August last year for a draft report which still has not been finished. I recently received correspondence from the minister – about two weeks ago – highlighting the fact that this plan for our region, the Barwon South West and the Great South Coast, is still many weeks, if not months, away.

The drought is immediate. Stakeholders right across my region are on the phone and through my office regularly. If we were experiencing a bushfire, if we were experiencing a drought, there would be immediate and prompt government assistance. The responsible emergency services minister would be down in the region inspecting the cost and consequences of the drought. A drought not only affects the farm households and the agricultural output but has a devastating effect also on the country towns and communities. I spent much of last week touring many of the country towns in this region and will again next week. I will be down around Cobden, Timboon, Simpson and so on. These communities and the shopkeepers are really suffering. In fact, the feedback was that the drop in spending and the retraction in economic activity in these regions at the moment has not been experienced in anyone's living memory.

There is a real crisis, and the message that a visit from the minister sends to the community is very powerful. It says that the government is with them and that the government cares. It is really, really important that the knowledge is out there. It then gives banks and others licence to take care and be aware that there is a real problem. It needs the government's support, and I urge the minister to find the time to come to visit.

Inclusive Schools Fund

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (19:07): (804) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me at Livingstone Primary School. Victoria is the Education State, and this is only possible thanks to our high-quality public education system, which our government supports. I take this opportunity to once again urge the federal government to come to the table and ensure that our public schools are fully funded. Public education provides an opportunity for every single child, no matter their background or socio-economic status, to learn the knowledge and skills they need for the future. It gives people hope for a better future and it opens countless doors for the next generation to unleash their potential.

Part of the Allan Labor government's commitment to the public education system is our Inclusive Schools Fund and what is now the ninth round of this program. Livingstone Primary School was the successful applicant. Located in Vermont South, in my electorate, Livingstone has been awarded \$189,327 to build a new playground. This is an inclusive playground which will give children of all abilities new ways to socialise, develop and learn through play.

And a shout-out also to Burwood Heights Primary School in Burwood East, who have also received funding through the Inclusive Schools Fund. Thanks to this government, Burwood Heights has been allocated \$299,529 to also build an inclusive playground.

I am proud to be part of the Allan Labor government, which supports equality and fairness in our schools, teaching our next generation respect and inclusivity. I thank the minister and his team for their work, and I look forward to his response.

Planning policy

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (19:09): (805) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Planning. The action I seek is for the minister to provide clarity on whether homes will be able to be constructed at all on vacant lots where a 0.8-metre sea level rise is forecast in the future, where flooding may occur. I raise this for the Minister for Planning, but to be frank I am not entirely sure whether it might in fact be for the Minister for Water, because it does relate to catchment management authorities (CMAs) having the opportunity to object to potential permit applications for housing. But I think it is the Minister for Planning, because it relates, as I understand, to planning scheme amendment VC171.

Recently the Wellington shire in my electorate wrote to some 350 vacant land property owners, effectively saying that new rules have been brought in which say that planning decisions across the Victorian coastline must consider a sea level rise of at least 0.8 metres. Whilst they are not saying that homes will not be approved in that zone, they are effectively saying it is going to be very difficult and probably the CMA will be objecting to that. We know that generally when the CMA objects, although they do not have veto power anymore, there will be an issue. Although those letters have just only just gone out, already I am starting to get concern from people who own vacant land in areas like Loch Sport, McLoughlins Beach, Port Albert and Golden Beach. They are wondering if they will be able to build a property there at all. One of the issues that has come up is not the area of land itself, as to whether that will be subject to inundation in 2100, but whether the egress and ingress, the road into that property, will be subject to inundation. That in itself I think is a serious concern.

I respect and understand that this is a bit of a wicked problem. We do have some difficult decisions to make, but I think that the letter that has now gone out from Wellington shire – this will happen in South Gippsland shire, and it will no doubt happen in Colac Otway shire and many other places along the coastline – will raise serious concern among people who are planning to build a house, who are planning to retire to those areas or who are planning to set up their life in these areas, and I think we need some serious level of clarity from the state government. I know that councils have been a bit frustrated on this issue for a long time and that state governments, including previous governments, have not taken a leadership role on this, but I think communities are going to want to see some clarity. Will they be allowed to build homes in those areas? I would appreciate if the Minister for Planning could provide some clarity on that.

Willum Warrain

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (19:12): (806) Firstly I would just like to say that this adjournment has been written for me by Kayla Page, from Mount Erin Secondary College, who has been doing work experience in my office. I say thank you to Kayla.

My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples. The action I seek is for the minister to join me in visiting the wonderful space that is Willum Warrain. This place is a very spiritual and special place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to come together to explore identity. Willum Warrain in local Boon Wurrung language means 'home by the sea.' In the late 1980s the Hastings Aboriginal community was quite sizeable, with many families living in the area. They started to gather in the old community house. It was run by a few non-Indigenous women, who responded to the need for a place to feel safe and comfortable together. In 1995 the community had a desire for a place of their own, so Kaala Koorie was formed. After 13 years of operating, Kaala Koorie ceased to run and there was no Aboriginal organisation in Hastings for two years. Then from 2010 to 2013, after much discussion, a new organisation was formed. Willum Warrain was established in 2014 in Hastings with support from Mornington Peninsula shire and funding from the Closing the Gap program. Willum Warrain is regarded as a place of hope, belonging and culture. I certainly agree with that. I look forward to welcoming the minister to this community.

Docklands Primary School

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (19:13): (807) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Education. I am asking the minister to visit Docklands Primary School in my electorate and meet with parents and staff so he can see for himself the success of this great school but also the significant challenges the school is facing, which the state government must fix urgently. This is a school that opened in 2021 – just three years ago – to great fanfare as one of Victoria’s first high-rise schools, and it is already showing great success. They have been nominated for several awards and their evidence-based explicit phonics teaching has been a huge success, with other schools using it as a model. The students are thriving, and more and more parents are sending their children to Docklands, but the school is finding it almost impossible to get the government to fix some issues that need urgent attention.

Firstly, the existing school building has a number of defects back from when it was originally built three years ago, including significant leaking, doors that will not open and close and brick tiles falling off the outside of the building. While the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) is aware of these, there does not seem to be any urgency in getting them fixed. The issues are clearly building defects from when the school was built, but the school is now being asked to fix them out of its own pocket, which is really not fair to students at the school.

Secondly, the school needs more space. They are near their capacity of 535 students already, after just three years, and they will see another 100 or so preps join next year – a great testament to how good the school is and their reputation, but the government has failed to properly plan for space for these kids. The VSBA has had to rent space down the road in the shopping centre to create enough classrooms for all the kids, but they need a permanent solution for this growth. Luckily there are a number of high-rise development sites adjacent to the school, and if the state government and Melbourne City Council work together, they can be used in innovative ways to create extra classrooms and also play spaces for the school. In one case, land owned by Development Victoria right next to the school is already earmarked for civic use. It could be used for a permanent expansion of the school if the government decided to do so.

Thirdly, there are a number of maintenance issues with the new campus that need to be urgently addressed. Some are significant safety issues, and some are really affecting the kids’ learning, such as the department saying they have run out of money to put blinds on the west- and north-facing windows so kids cannot even see the whiteboards due to the glare and the teachers have to stick paper on the windows to deal with it.

I would be happy to talk to the minister with more information about the specifics of some of these issues and to help get them addressed. Docklands is a great school with a wonderful community, but the staff and parents should not have to spend all their time advocating for basic maintenance needs or sufficient classrooms and facilities for their students, especially in a school that is just a few years old. I very much hope that the minister will arrange a visit to the school and then get these fixed.

Bayswater South Primary School

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (19:16): (808) I am always proud and stoked to back in local schools in the area I represent in the beautiful, beautiful Knox local government area. Of course one of those fantastic local schools is Bayswater South Primary School, one of the few truly bilingual schools in this state.

A member interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: Dankeschön. German is the other language they teach in that school. It is a great school community. I work very closely with the principal Bret Mottrom there and the entire school, from council to parents to students. I am very proud to back them each and every single day, and of course so is the Allan Labor government. At the last election we promised we would deliver an

\$11 million upgrade for new classrooms; work is proceeding at a rate of knots. The matter I would like to raise is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to give my community an update on when we can expect construction to start on this important upgrade. This important upgrade is about delivering first-class facilities. It is about delivering the modern facilities that not just the students deserve but also the teachers and families of that very proud and strong school community.

This is one of many, many projects we are getting delivered in the electorate that I represent in Knox, whether it is Bayswater South Primary School, whether it is Kent Park, whether it is Templeton, whether it is Wantirna College, whether it is St Joseph's, whether it is St Bernadette's, whether it is Bayswater Secondary or whether it is Bayswater Primary. I could go on, but I promised the member for Glen Waverley I would wrap up in 60 seconds, so like a typical polly, I have lied.

Members interjecting.

Jackson TAYLOR: I am just saying that is what some people think. It is the life we live.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is also unparliamentary.

Jackson TAYLOR: I am very proud to have delivered over \$90 million of upgrades for schools in my electorate, and I look forward to hearing from the minister.

Bass Coast lifestyle villages

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (19:18): (809) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. My electorate of Bass is home to eight established and emerging residential lifestyle villages, from Inverloch, Wonthaggi, Phillip Island and Grantville in Bass Coast to Clyde in the south-east. Whilst our residents love their lifestyle neighbourhoods and the sense of community and social wellbeing that they bring, for some time now they have shared with me their concerns, including unfair fees and charges, a lack of standardised contracts and no means of dispute resolution, amongst other issues. Jenny Lonergan from Phillip Island has been a tireless advocate for better protections for those in her lifestyle community, and she first raised this as a concern with me back in July 2022. I am so pleased that our minister and government have committed to developing new reforms and protections that will assist in providing our constituents with a sense of security and peace of mind when they enter into a contract to reside in a residential village. Minister, can you please provide an update on how the anticipated proposed reforms will benefit our lifestyle village residents in Bass and across the many others in Victoria. I hope this one is not ruled out of order.

Six Ways intersection, Lara

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:20): (810) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I seek is an update on the progress of the investment into the Six Ways intersection in Lara. This was a \$16 million investment committed to by the state government a couple of years ago. It is a very, very busy intersection in Lara with, as the name suggests, six different roads coming in and out, and it gets particularly busy during school hours and at those busy peak times. So, once again, the request that I have for the minister for roads is an update on the Six Ways intersection.

Responses

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (19:20): I have to apologise on behalf of the chamber. The Liberal Party has forgotten to show up. They have run out of adjournment items, so they obviously do not feel that there are too many issues of a pressing nature in Victoria for them to raise. Maybe they have gone home, I am not sure, but it is strange. I do not think in my time in this place I have seen two adjournments missed on the same night. It is an extraordinary thing for people –

Members interjecting.

Colin BROOKS: One adjournment missed. We just have the two members of the opposition in the chamber, who obviously do care about issues in their electorate, but of course maybe others do not. It is an extraordinary thing, I think, to see, the fact that the Liberal Party has just not bothered to show up to this adjournment tonight. The member for Polwarth, though, did raise a matter for the Minister for Agriculture to visit Polwarth and meet key dairy industry representatives regarding the impact of the drought in that area, and I will make sure that the matter is passed on to the minister. The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the Minister for Education to provide an update on the status of the Lyndhurst Secondary College upgrade, which will of course support students and families in his electorate. The member for Gippsland South raised a matter for the Minister for Planning to provide clarity on where homes will be able to be built when they are affected by potential future sea level rises. He mentioned a particular planning scheme amendment – VC171, I think it was – and I will make sure that matter is passed on.

The member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the Minister for Education. He asked that the minister visit Livingstone Primary School in Vermont South to talk about the important Inclusive Schools funding that that school has received. That is a great program that is providing so much benefit for schools right around the state and particularly for kids with additional needs. I had a slot here for a Liberal Party member, but they did not turn up. The member for Hastings raised a matter for the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples to visit Willum Warrain in his electorate in Hastings. He gave a shout-out to I think it was Kayla Page, the work experience student who drafted that adjournment item for the member. I think I will get that student in to draft my speeches as well. That was really well written. The member for Melbourne raised a matter for the Minister for Education to visit Docklands Primary School in the member's electorate.

The member for Bayswater raised a matter for the Minister for Education to provide an update on Bayswater South Primary School and the construction of the important upgrade works that are going on at that particular school. The member for Evelyn jumped in up the front and raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to provide a detailed project timeline for the completion of the Montrose intersection upgrade. The member for Bass raised a matter for the Minister for Consumer Affairs to provide an update on how potential reforms to residential villages will benefit her constituents, and I am sure that her constituents will want that matter responded to by the minister. The member for Lara jumped up because the Liberal Party did not show up and raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and asked for an update on the Six Ways intersection upgrade in Lara. I thank the member for raising that matter. I will make sure it is passed on.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:24 pm.